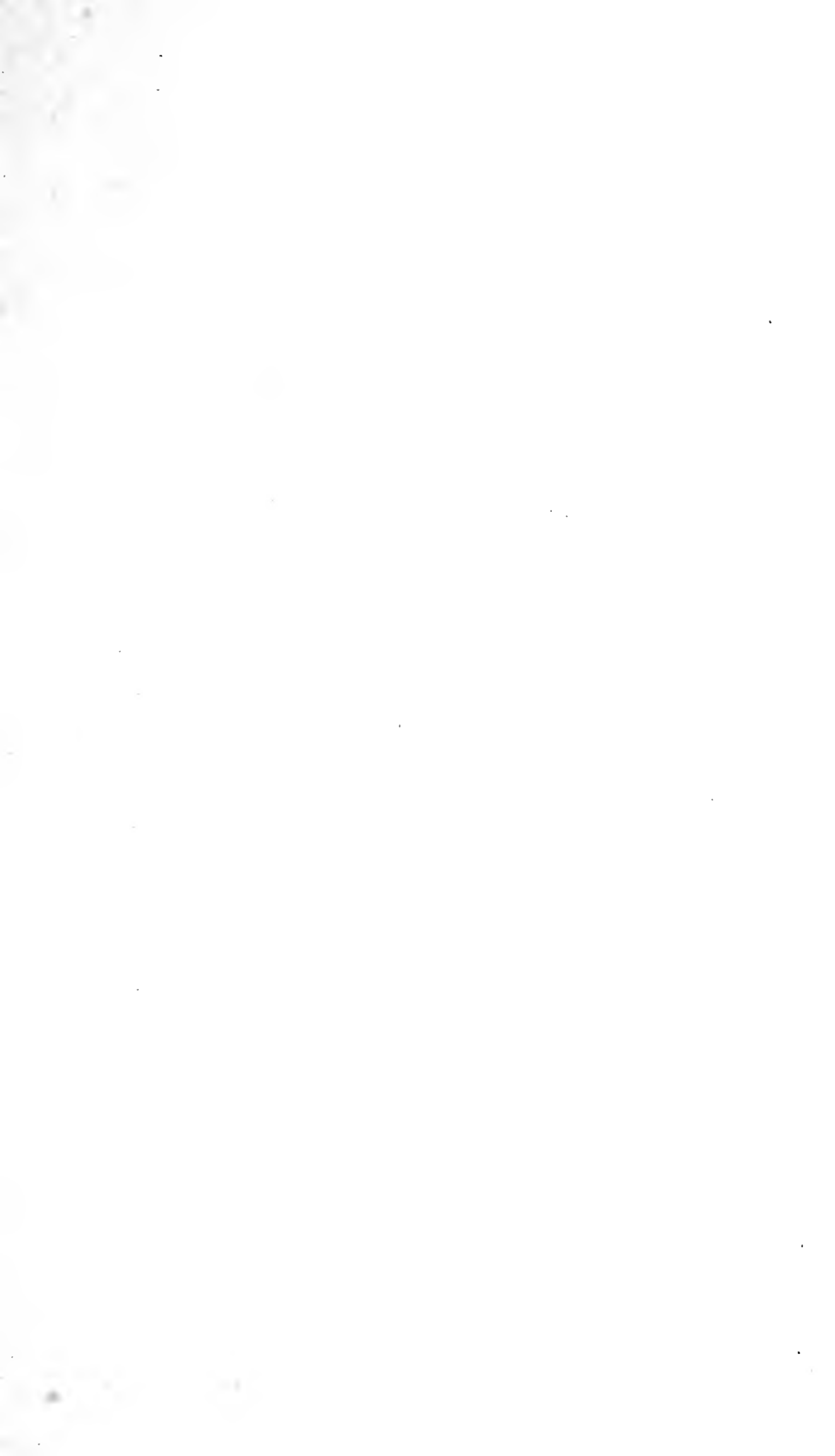




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HOW WILL IT END?

BY

AGNES STRICKLAND.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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HOW WILL IT END?



CHAPTER I.

THE third evening after the death of Mistress Kezia Briggs was wild and lowering, the wind sighed through the long galleries and wide staircases of the hall, and strewed the courtyard with the withering leaves which it whirled from the old ash trees and sallows that overhung the moat; the robin was singing a wintry note, and there was a hoarse and sullen murmur from the swollen waters of the Troutbeck rushing into Windermere.

The gloom without was in perfect unison with Althea's feelings, as she sat in the deep

solitude of the chamber of death, by the coffin of her deceased kinswoman, which was covered with a black velvet pall, and placed beneath the canopied dome of the old-fashioned state bed, which she had been accustomed to occupy in life. The canopy of that bed was, according to the prevailing fashion of those days, ornamented with a cornice of carved ebony, and crowned with nodding plumes of black ostrich feathers; the curtains of rich damask, of the darkest tint of purple, were closely drawn round the bed, excepting on the side where Althea sat, on a low stool, covered with the same material.

The failing light, though greatly diminished by the effect of the heavy draperies of the like sombre colour, descending in ample folds from the lofty window-cornices to the ground, yet struggled with the dim and sickly ray of a single lamp, which was placed on a stand near the coffin, and cast a more wan and melancholy shade on the pale, tearful

cheek of the lonely mourner, as it rested on the bier of her friend. In one hand she held the little gold-clasped Geneva Bible, which had been so constantly the companion of the deceased that it seemed scarcely less than a part of herself, and was now esteemed by Althea as a relic so precious that no price that could have been named for it would have purchased it from her. She had been endeavouring to draw comfort from its inspired pages, but the wound was too recent to experience at that moment the healing influence of the balm of Gilead.

Her eyes had become dim from excessive weeping, and refused their office, and their hot and swollen lids were heavy, and appeared inclined to close involuntarily, though not in the blissful unconsciousness of sleep. With her other hand she mechanically grasped the velvet pall, with the sable hue of which its exquisite fairness was powerfully contrasted; and had the flowing dress

that enfolded her round yet slender form, and descended in ample waves of drapery to her feet, been of white, instead of the funereal cypress and crape of which it was composed, she might, amidst the sombre folds of the purple curtains, at that dim hour, and by the uncertain and tremulous rays of the untrimmed lamp, have been mistaken for statuary of masterly execution. As it was, her appearance was so little that of a breathing creature of flesh and blood, that it occasioned an audible start, and the fearful demand of "What art thou?" from a person who had entered unobserved by her, and was advancing with heavy measured steps towards the bier, when his progress was suddenly arrested by the sight of this unexpected watcher by the recent dead.

Althea, roused from her abstractive melancholy reverie with this question, started violently in her turn, and a half-suppressed cry escaped her lips as she looked up, and became,

if possible, more wan of hue than before, as her dark, tearful eyes encountered the fixed stare of the gloomy orbs of Colonel Briggs, who now stood before her, and the silent horror which they expressed was, as it were, reflected in her own.

The recognition was mutual, for thus pale and unearthly had been her appearance when last he looked upon her on that dreadful night, when driven to desperation by him, she had rashly meditated, nay, attempted, the sinful act of self-destruction. Hard of heart and pitiless of temper as he was, that night had never been obliterated from his memory ; and often in the stilly midnight hour, in the loneliness of his tent, or the watch on the listed plain, her form had been conjured before him, either by the fantasy of troubled dreams, or the yet more powerful magic of waking imagination.

It is not wonderful that her appearance in the place and manner we have described

should have been so startling, under all circumstances, to a person whose nervous system was in such a state of excitement as that of Colonel Briggs. Albeit the existence of such a thing as a nervous system was in those days unknown, and those who suffered from its disarrangement were gravely described as being somewhat melancholic, and afflicted with megrims, vapours, or the spleen.

There was for the space of some seconds a deep pause, while each surveyed the other in silence, which neither at first appeared disposed to break; but when at length Colonel Briggs, in a low, hoarse voice, exclaimed :

“ Althea Woodville, is it thou?” and the creaking of his huge military boots indicated that he was about to make a step in advance towards her, Althea flung her arms over the bier, and calling in a tone of piercing anguish upon the name of its lifeless inmate, she clung to it in wild terror, as if for protection.

“ What is the meaning of this unnecessary

transport ?” demanded Briggs, scornfully. “Do you suppose, Althea, that you have any cause for alarm from me, in the presence of my sister’s ashes ?”

Althea remained silent, and endeavoured to recover some degree of self-possession. She raised herself from the coffin as he approached it, and would have left the room, but her trembling limbs refused their office, and she sank down upon the low seat by the bedside, on which she had rested previously to his entrance.

He took the lamp from the stand in silence, and without bestowing further notice on Althea (who still remained in a state of violent agitation), than that of passing the light across her face, and scanning her with a furtive but scrutinizing glance ; as he did so, he approached the bier, and flinging back the pall, removed the coffin lid with a hand in which a slight tremor was perceptible, and drawing the lawn from the face of the dead,

he gazed long and earnestly upon it with a stern attention.

The cold form had only recently been shrouded and consigned to its last narrow receptacle, and Althea had sought the lonely chamber where it rested with the intention of looking her last upon those dear and honoured features, ere they should be shut from her sight for ever. She had not, however, summoned sufficient resolution to remove the coffin lid, when the sudden entrance of Briggs arrested her purpose, and caused a strange and fearful revulsion in the tone of her feelings, from the solemn softness of subdued grief which they were fast assuming, to the wild tumult of contending passions which his unexpected return had excited in her bosom. But these in their turn subsided into emotions of a character more in unison with her present absorbing sorrow for the recent bereavement she had sustained, when her tearful eyes rested once more upon the countenance of

her beloved kinswoman. The stern dignity of that countenance was singularly softened by the hand of death, the piercing gaze of the penetrating eye was now hidden beneath the veiled lid. The characteristic knit of the brow, and the usually severe rigidity of the muscles of the face were relaxed, a tranquil smile slightly parted the usually firmly-compressed lips, and the divine impress of ineffable and perfect peace which rested on those pale features afforded a striking and affecting contrast to the expression of conflicting passions which so fearfully agitated the living who looked upon them.

His sister was the only thing on earth for whom Briggs had ever entertained the slightest affection. They were the only children of their parents. She was many years his senior, and her lofty rectitude of principle and action had compelled him to regard her with habitual reverence and respect.

In externals at least there was a strong

resemblance between them. Their politics, their creed, were the same; they entertained a similarity of opinion in respect to dress, manners, and all those every-day matters which give the general tone to the character, as far as regards its outward similitude, without in the slightest degree affecting the deep things of the heart; and in those the brother and sister were indeed widely different and differing from each other. On more than one occasion the master mind of Mistress Kezia Briggs had asserted its superiority, and he had bowed beneath its influence, especially when she boldly stepped between him and his evil passions, and preserved him from the guilt of additional crime.

She was the only being in whom he could ever bring himself to repose confidence; for the general feelings of distrust and suspicion with which he regarded the whole human race extended not to her, and to her he had been accustomed from his earliest days

to turn for counsel in his difficulties, consolation in his disappointments, and at times almost for refuge and protection from himself.

The ties of blood had been very powerfully acknowledged by her, and notwithstanding her abhorrence of certain traits in his character, she had loved him. Of this he was aware, and was at the same time fully conscious of the painful fact that no one did beside. He was sensible that the link, the solitary link, that united him in sympathy of any kind with a single human being was broken. The agony of that wrench was legibly written on his strongly-marked features, and a tear hung upon his cheek as he sternly replaced the mournful panoply of death, and turning about, strode with a heavy step out of the chamber, leaving it to Althea and solitude.

How in such a moment could Merab's prophecy recur to her mind? Ah! rather ask on what mysterious wings the powers of

thought carry the imagination to scenes it never meant to visit, and bring a strange assemblage of forgotten events and persons to our presence. Who shall account for these things, and, without fathoming the cause, presume to censure those who involuntarily experience the effect of such association ?

“ ‘Think of me when you sit in loneliness by the dead that is now living,’ were the mystical words of Merab to me when we stood together by the lake side on the never-to-be-forgotten eve of summer beauty, on which I first beheld that earthly Eden, Long Holme Island. Alas ! I listened to them with mingled terror, doubt, and hope, at that moment ; but with what feelings I afterwards from time to time recalled them, I dare not analyze. But I looked not that they should be fulfilled thus !” said Althea, in her lonely communings with her own sad heart in the chamber of death, and bowing her face upon

the bier, she gave her overcharged feelings vent in tears, floods of tears; and it was not till long after the hour of midnight was passed that she retired to her own apartment to seek that repose which her weary frame and grief-worn spirit required.

CHAPTER II.

ALTHEA's manner, when she met Colonel Briggs at breakfast the following day, was greatly softened from the undeviating tone of haughty coldness or scornful contempt which she had hitherto manifested towards him at such moments when she was compelled to endure his society. She had in fact been systematic in her endeavours to render herself so completely an object of aversion to him, that he might of his own accord relinquish an engagement which his daily experience of the sentiments with which his betrothed regarded him, might well convince him would be productive of nothing but

misery to both parties. With this object in view, Althea had played her part on all occasions of intercourse with Briggs in a manner sufficiently vexatious to him ; but it had been productive of no other result than that of irritating his already morose temper, and strengthening his resolution of marrying her out of sheer revenge for the mortification her sharp and ready wit inflicted upon him. At other times, however, Briggs, who felt himself, with respect to his fair enemy, precisely in the situation of the cat who has got a lively mouse under her paw, and is amused and excited rather than displeased with its impotent struggles and manifestations of abhorrence, took a positive delight in witnessing the petulance and angry feelings which she exhibited. She had allowed him to perceive her drift, and he knew that, though she was proud, passionate, and high-spirited, yet she was constitutionally sweet-tempered, and pos-

sessed of a thousand lovely feminine qualities which were calculated to overbalance her defects, and render any home of which she was the mistress cheerful and agreeable. "I shall have a few sharp encounters with her at first," he thought; "but when once she is my wife and the mother of my children, she will, in the natural course of things, become reconciled to her situation; and in the meanwhile her acute perception of right and wrong will prevent her from doing anything in direct opposition to the law of conscience, whose witness is to her in the place of true religion in the soul."

At other moments Althea appeared to have the power of bringing her affianced almost to the desired point; nor did she despair of provoking him into the exclamation, "That he would rather be hanged, drawn, and quartered, than become the husband of such a shrewd-tongued vixen." Such a declaration from the lips of Briggs, no matter how extorted, Althea

meant to consider as a formal release from her detested plight; and it must be acknowledged that she omitted no means that were likely to lead to a consummation so devoutly to be wished on her part.

Ofttimes had she been on the very verge of success; but Briggs, in his highest state of exasperation, always retained sufficient self-command to abstain from the utterance of so imprudent a sentence, though it was more than once at his tongue's end; and it appeared so very natural an expression, under the circumstances of the case, that it was with the utmost difficulty he refrained himself from giving it vent; but to make up for his moderation in that instance, he had ventilated his temper by an effusion of a variety of taunts, not a whit less disobliging to Althea, but, unluckily for her, not bearing the precise interpretation which this would have done.

Althea, nevertheless, though so often baffled

in her expectations, when she had laid such promising traps to surprise Briggs into a retort, so ready, so pat to the purpose, and so probable, considering his irritable temper, for him to make, did not despair of finally extorting it from him in a moment of ungovernable ill-humour; but she was too generous to testify feelings of a hostile character towards him when she beheld him in affliction. They were now united in one cause of grief, and it was the first time that sympathy of any kind had existed between them.

The strong features of Briggs bore the traces of great mental suffering, and there was a visible depression on his spirits; but sorrow produced no amelioration of his manners, which were, if possible, more gloomily morose than ever. He spoke little, replied in stern, short monosyllables when addressed, and scarcely tasted food.

Althea did not attempt to offer consolation to him on an occasion where she felt that it

would be wholly unavailing; but she relaxed at once from the disdainful bearing with which she had always comported herself towards him, and true to the generous feelings of woman, endeavoured by a thousand silent delicate attentions to divert his thoughts from the distressing subject which occupied them.

Briggs was not so entirely engrossed by his sorrow as to be wholly insensible of a change so obvious and kindness so unmerited on the part of Althea; but far from attributing the softness of her tones and the soothing tenderness of her manner to the true cause, he cast about in his own mind to account for it in some way connected with sinister motives, and while he regarded her with an eye of jealous suspicion, he became more inaccessible and gloomily taciturn than ever.

Elkanah Nobbs was too deeply engaged in the mental travail he endured to utter a single word, though his lips moved incessantly, his eyebrows worked up and down, the skin of

his forehead wrinkled and expanded, and his very hair appeared in a state of painful agitation from the laborious process of composing the funeral sermon of his deceased patroness, a process for which his poor brains were little qualified, and which his intense anxiety to bring to perfection rendered a task of still greater difficulty.

Althea, finding herself repelled in her compassionate attempts to soothe the troubled spirit of her affianced husband, relapsed herself into settled sadness; and the trio, when they met (which was at meals only), after a brief salutation had been coldly exchanged, remained in stern and solemn silence till they parted.

Under these circumstances the air of Calgarth Hall became more oppressively gloomy than of old, and Althea sought the chamber of death mechanically day after day while the remains of her deceased kinswoman reposed there, as the only corner of the mansion

that contained an object of interest for her, an object that was so soon to be consigned to the cold unconscious womb of earth, and for ever hidden from her sight.

CHAPTER III.

THE preparations for the funeral of Mrs. Kezia Briggs were at length complete, and Althea, who had all along imagined that it would take place at Bowness or Staveley, heard with astonishment that it was Briggs's intention to deposit the remains of his sister in Kendal Church.

His grandfather was a native of Kendal, and having been treated with very little respect by his townsfolk, had resolved on astonishing them after his death with the pomp of his obsequies and the magnificence of his monument in their church.

Althea, when she heard the interment was

to take place in Kendal Church, imagined that burial rites of her departed kinswoman could not be performed there otherwise than in the form prescribed in the liturgy, and under this impression cherished a fond wish of being present when the remains of that beloved friend were consigned to their last resting-place; and after a few struggles with the natural reluctance she felt at preferring a request to Colonel Briggs, she at length resolved on seeking him and making her desire of attending, as one of the mourners, known to him.

The morning appointed for the funeral procession leaving Calgarth Hall arrived before she had summoned up resolution to do so. The hearse, with its six black horses, decorated with sable plumes and trappings, was drawn up to the hall-door. The neighbouring peasantry and the distressed poor for many miles round were assembled in the courtyard to receive the accustomed dole

of bread and meat, and money, which in those days were dealt out in the Northern counties at the funeral of every person of wealth and consequence.

A train of armed horsemen in mourning cloaks, with crape scarfs and hat-bands, chiefly consisting of Briggs's tenants, were mounted, in readiness to attend and guard the corpse and its mourners, while the kindred of the deceased—both male and female—of every degree, whether high or low, that could claim the slightest degree of affinity with her, save those of the Philipson blood, were, together with such of the country gentlemen attached to the cause of the Parliament with whom Briggs was on terms of friendship, assembled in the spacious drawing-room saloon and library, all which were hung with black and thrown open for the accommodation of the numerous company.

The magnificent coffin of Mistress Kezia Briggs, covered with rich black Genoa velvet,

with silver gilt plates and handles, and emblazoned scutcheons, had been placed in the centre apartment, that all comers might behold it previous to its final removal.

Its immediate vicinity was occupied by several of the most celebrated puritanical preachers of the day, who had been invited to Calgarth Hall to grace the obsequies of so distinguished a member and patroness of their sect as the late Mistress Kezia Briggs, to whose shining faith and pious works they bore elaborate witness in the discourses which each in turn pronounced over her coffin, to the great dissatisfaction of the mortified chaplain, who had at length compounded and, with infinite pains, prepared himself for the delivery of the important funeral oration with which his overburdened brain had so long teemed ; and now that the time for bringing forth the precious fruits of all his internal labour had arrived, he found himself forestalled in his office and cast into the shade by strangers and

interlopers, who could not be supposed to be in any respect so ably qualified for the office of setting forth the holy life and Christian graces of the deceased as he was, who had been for the last twenty years her spiritual director, almoner, and friend. He considered himself an injured person on the occasion, and his vexation was the greater when he found that his patron, Colonel Briggs, to whom he whispered an earnest appeal on the subject of his wrongs, was not only indifferent to them, but infinitely gratified by the intrusive harangues of his spiritual rivals; and when, irritated beyond the bounds of his wonted patience and forbearance, the luckless chaplain presumed to offer further remonstrance, Briggs enjoined silence in an authoritative tone, informing him at the same time, "that in the presence of such shining and burning lamps as Masters Hugh Peters, Alexander Henderson, and other gifted, faithful, approved, and beloved preachers of

the word, it behoved him, Elkanah Nobbs, to keep silence and content himself with the privilege of being a hearer, and he might haply be vouchsafed grace to gather up a few of their precious crumbs."

Of all the bitter draughts poor Elkanah had ever quaffed, none had savoured so strongly of gall and wormwood as this intimation.

He called it "a rebuke, a buffeting from Satan, and an injurious piece of tyrannical caprice and ingratitude on the part of his patron," with whom his habitual caution and prudent care for the main chance alone prevented him from bandying words on the occasion, or leaving the room in token of his contempt for the preachers who were infringing in so unwelcome a manner on the duties of his calling. He therefore adopted the wiser plan of keeping silence during these officious outpourings ; but the most light-minded cavalier that ever wore lovelocks and

feathers, and scoffed at starched band and cap of Geneva, could not have listened with greater reluctance or more bitter disgust to a three-glass sermon in a Scotch conventicle than did this professing chaplain of the godly Colonel Briggs to the precious exhortations of his sectarian brethren, although in high-flown panegyric of his departed patroness, and largely interspersed with fulminations against royalty and episcopacy, of which the deceased—it was known—had been all her life a zealous opposer.

These harangues, however interminable they might appear to the weary and offended ears of the malcontent chaplain, were at length concluded, and the preachers, after exchanging the usual proportion of spiritual flattery with each other, and listening with a proper show of humility to the compliments and thanks of their military host, sat down to partake of the refreshment of spiced wines and rich cakes which were, as was customary

on such occasions, dispensed to the relations and guests previous to the funeral procession setting forth from the Hall. Elkanah Nobbs might then, had he chosen to have done so, have embraced the opportunity of addressing a word to the assembly on the merits of his deceased patroness; he was even invited to speak by one of the preachers of less consequence than the rest, who, having been unceremoniously cut short in his outpouring by Master Hugh Peters, had a fellow-feeling for the superseded chaplain, whom he benevolently determined to encourage in his vocation; but Elkanah, with a tremulous lip, for he was moved almost to tears by the slight that had been put upon him before his own congregation, assured worthy Master Blair that “he felt no inclination to waste his precious things by uttering them while people were eating, drinking, or tying on hoods, scarfs, and hatbands; but since he had been clean put out of his office by strangers, he should keep silence

till a more fitting season for being heard, even at the funeral itself, in the great Church of Kendal, where he trusted to make a few ears tingle with the sermon that he felt himself called to preach by a higher authority than Master Hugh Peters, or any other preacher of the word could presume to set on one side."

"Yea, pious brother," rejoined Master Elias Blair, "I perceive that thou art a persecuted man, and, like myself, thrust back from the ministry by the presumption of those whose gifts appear to me rather of the lips than the heart."

"Nay, good brother, I presume not to judge much less to condemn," said Elkanah; "only thus much I must have licence to observe, that the matter of these men's discourses was by no means precious unto edification, but rather resembled the tinkling of brass or hollow cymbals, being a vain combination of unprofitable words, such as I will be bold

to affirm would have been less pleasing unto the ears of my departed patroness, of pious memory, than the sermon of a stark episcopalian ; yea, though one had preached before her arrayed in that abominable rag of unrighteousness—commonly called a surplice.”

“I protest unto you, my dear brother in the faith,” whispered Master Elias Blair, “that I have heard better doctrine from a man clothed in a surplice than from this boasted vessel, Hugh Peters, whom you heard even now silence me in the midst of a more profitable discourse than was in his power to deliver.”

“Oh ! that you might have been permitted to hear the word that I was prepared to put forth on this sad occasion,” groaned the disappointed chaplain.

“No doubt but I should have found it very comfortable,” responded the other ; “but give me leave under favour to say that nothing

could have surpassed the excellency of the discourse in which I was cut short in so unmannerly a way by Master Peters."

"Craving your pardon, worthy brother," interposed the chaplain, "I must differ from you there, for I am convinced that mine would have been esteemed by any judge of sound divinity, that might have chanced to hear it (if so be I had not been so unhandsomely circumvented by yon intrusive medlers and busybodies); yea, such a one as would have done my deceased lady good to hear."

"As I did not hear it, good Master Nobbs," rejoined Master Elias Blair, "you must excuse me from giving it the preference to my own, which, albeit, I was cut short before I had arrived at the cream and marrow of it; yet, I think, you must allow I afforded you a good sample."

"Ay, ay; as far as it went, Master Blair, your holding forth was profitable enough, and certes the most worthy of attention of any-

thing I have heard this day ; and furthermore, I do suspect that Master Hugh Peters cut you short out of sheer envy, lest his own discourse should appear empty and unsound after yours."

"Oh, Master Nobbs, you are pleased to flatter," exclaimed the gratified preacher ; "not that I think myself a whit inferior to Master Hugh Peters in my vocation, though I am not a man in favour with the ladies, as I have never pretended to intermeddle with politics, which, in truth, belong not to a Christian minister's calling, however suitable to a priest of Baal."

CHAPTER IV.

THE complaints of the two slighted ministers were cut short by Colonel Briggs rising from his seat and beckoning to Bethuliel, who was in the advance, to buckle on his sword-belt, which motion was, of course, taken by all the company as a signal for them to assume their cloaks, hoods, and scarfs, in preparation for forming into the funereal procession, and there was a general movement for that purpose. At this moment the folding-doors were thrown open, and Althea, attired in a travelling-dress of the deepest mourning, glided into the saloon, and making a slight but graceful inclination of courteous salutation

to the company in general, without distinguishing by any particular greeting those individuals among them who were personally known to her, she advanced directly to Colonel Briggs, who was standing beside the coffin of his sister in the centre of a group of the puritan ministers, with whom he was conversing in the technical phraseology of their sect, while Bethuliel was engaged in adjusting his sword-belt, and settling with due precision the arrangement of his crape scarf over the buff coat and defensive armour with which the offensive temper of the times permitted no leading man to dispense when he appeared in public.

Briggs was so completely engrossed and divided between the formal punctilios of his dress and the attention which policy required him to pay to the conversation of men of such immense influence among the enthusiasts of the puritan party as pious Master Peters and Co., that the silent entrance of

Althea was not observed by him, nor was he aware of her presence till she stood at his side, and laying her hand on his arm, said in a low but distinct voice :

“May I be permitted a word with you, Colonel Briggs?”

The military puritan started back in surprise, both at the unexpected appearance of his betrothed and her manner of claiming his attention; for never before, from the first moment of their acquaintance, had she made such an advance towards familiarity with him. It was peculiarly gratifying to his self-love that such an unequivocal indication of confidential intercourse with him should have been manifested before so large an assembly of his compeers, neighbours, friends, and political associates by his high-born and beautiful ward, whose distinguished graceful carriage and singular loveliness had attracted every eye but his own on her entrance; and though her costume and bearing bespoke her

a decided royalist and opposer of their creed and politics, there was a general murmur of admiration and curiosity among all the gentlemen present. Even the preachers rendered involuntary homage with their eyes to the charms of the fair malignant, to which the expression of deep but subdued sorrow had added that soft and touching interest which appeals so powerfully to the heart of man.

“Althea Woodville, what wouldst thou with me?” asked Briggs, softening his harsh voice almost into an insinuating tone, and looking upon her at the same time with a glance which he meant to be one of encouragement.

“That I may be permitted to attend the funeral of—of——” Her utterance of the name of a friend so beloved was impeded by a flood of tears.

The countenance of Colonel Briggs fell.

“You want to go to Kendal,” said he, in his usual harsh, dry tone, syllabling out his

words to an emphatic length, and fixing his eyes upon her with suspicious scrutiny.

“To pay the last token of outward respect to the remains of my honoured kinswoman,” said Althea, deliberately, while steadily returning his glance.

“Ay, that is the ostensible motive; but is there no covert, deep-laid scheme, couched beneath so plausible a—a—a—I want a term of proper significance, Althea Woodville, for I do not wish to *call* it a pretext,” said he, speaking in her ear.

“I am answered,” replied she, turning haughtily away, her cheek flushing with indignant crimson as she spoke.

“Patience, my fair cousin, patience,” said Briggs. “This is no place for broils or angry vituperance of tongue. This is the house of mourning, where, in sooth, a few of the faithful and pious master-builders in our new Jerusalem have assembled themselves together and spoken seasonable things to me

in my affliction, till the unction of consolation descended upon my soul. The voice of wrath and contention appears at this moment harsh and out of keeping."

"I raised it not," replied Althea, "for I bespoke you fairly, but you answered me with rude taunts and injurious suspicions."

"I was of course desirous of penetrating to the bottom your reasons for preferring a request which of course must appear to me, coming from a person of your principles, very extraordinary."

"It is sufficient, sir," said Althea, interrupting him, "that a request so trifling, so reasonable, and, considering the love I bare to the deceased, and our nearness of kin, so reasonable withal, has been refused in an offensive manner, and before strangers, too." She turned haughtily away, and was about to quit the apartment when Colonel Briggs, to whom Alexander Henderson had addressed a few words of an expostulatory nature in a

low voice, stepped between her and the door, and said :

“Cousin Althea, if I have appeared harsh of speech to thee, I pray thee to attribute it to the effects of the sorrow of this world, which worketh death. My spirit hath been sorely troubled for the loss of my sister, in which bereavement I have not sufficiently recognised the hand of him, whose chastisements are in mercy, though I have rebelled against them.”

Words of an apologetic nature from the lips of Colonel Briggs, Althea had never before heard. She did not pause to analyze the motive which in all probability prompted them, but yielding to the generous feelings of her heart, she, in token of amity, permitted him to take the cold and trembling hand, which had hitherto shrunk with a degree of involuntary horror from his touch, although the feeling of recoil that at the same moment thrilled her frame proved that her abhorrence

to the slightest personal contact with him was instinctive and unconquerable.

“And now, cousin Althea,” pursued Briggs, with a sort of grim attempt to look lovingly upon her, as he at the same time resisted with main strength her endeavours to withdraw her reluctant fingers from his hard, rough grasp, “if it be indeed your wish to honour the funeral of my departed sister with your presence, as indeed, in consequence of your nearness of kin with our house, of which your blessed mother was a gracious daughter, and, above all, in consideration of the still closer bond of alliance which is shortly about to unite thee and me in the holy estate of wedlock” (here Althea, with a convulsive shudder, succeeded in extricating her hand from his hold), “I, on deliberate reflection, do agree with thee that thy attendance at this sad solemnity is only meet and proper, and am not only willing, but anxious to afford thee every facility for the furtherance

of thy wish, which I heartily crave thy pardon for having in the first instance perversely withstood."

Althea bit her lip as she listened with mingled confusion and vexation to this pompous harangue, which afforded her ample occasion for regret that she had, in the unrestrained warmth of her feelings, preferred a request which had entailed upon her the twofold mortification of a rude repulse in the first instance, and the yet more unwelcome dilemma of compliance in the second.

Under the colours in which Colonel Briggs had artfully placed her attendance at the funeral of his sister, she plainly perceived she must appear in a relation to him which it was her earnest desire to avoid, and could she have done so without incurring the charge of versatility, almost approaching to the imputation of unfeeling levity at such a time, she would immediately have retracted her wish of being present at the obsequies of her

deceased kinswoman. Those obsequies, too, she now perceived, would not be solemnized according to the only forms which she, in her zealous attachment to the liturgy, considered as sacred, but would, on the contrary, afford to a large assembly of sectarian ministers an opportunity for inordinate fulminations against the doctrines, rights, and ceremonies of the episcopal church. Deeply lamenting the inconsiderate rashness which had involved her in the unnecessary embarrassment of making one of the congregation of preachers to whose principles and practice she was so thoroughly opposed, but at the same time feeling the impossibility of retreat, Althea permitted her guardian to lead her to the coach in which Kerenhappuch Crossthwaite and two ancient spinsters of the house of Briggs, distantly related to the deceased, were already placed, holding black-bordered lawn handkerchiefs to their eyes with all due solemnity; and when the procession moved

forward, they appeared to vie with each other in the most vehement display of grief. Althea, who had never seen these gentlewomen before, felt their company and clamorous demonstrations of sorrow as painful restraints to the indulgence of her own deep anguish on following to the grave the cold remains of a friend so loved and honoured as Mrs. Kezia Briggs. Even during the sad ceremony of placing the coffin in the hearse, preparatory to its final removal from Calgarth Hall, she alone shed no tears, and the mournful composure she preserved through the whole journey afforded sufficient matter for offensive innuendoes and observations on the part of her ostentatiously lachrymose companions.

CHAPTER V.

KENDAL, though not occupied by the troops of King Charles, was, like most of the towns in the north of England, well affected to the royal cause, and nothing but the consideration that they were unprepared for resistance to so numerous a body of armed men would have induced the civil authorities of that town to admit the funeral procession of Mrs. Kezia Briggs, headed as it was by a person so every way displeasing to its loyal inhabitants as Colonel Briggs, within their gates.

It was with evident ill-will, and without any of those little demonstrations of courtesy usually exchanged even among declared foes

on such occasions, that the hearse and its sable array of followers were, after an ungracious delay, sullenly admitted.

A November dense gloomy fog was beginning to obscure the horizon, though it was not yet four o'clock. In consequence of the premature approach of darkness, it was considered necessary to light the numerous flambeaus with which the attendants were provided, in order to give a more imposing effect to the procession of the funereal train through the streets of Kendal.

The torches appeared to burn dimly and reluctantly in the misty atmosphere, and their dull, red glare, as struggling with the fading daylight they vistaed the long, ancient street in a far extended line, threw an increased gloom on the steel-clad troopers, with their sable scarfs and trappings, the reeking horses, and the apparently interminable cavalcade of riders in mourning habiliments

who followed the plumed and scutcheoned hearse, and the coach-and-six with its formal attendants enveloped in large black cloaks, and wearing as usual the characteristic steeple-crowned hats of the puritan party, gave occasion for many a rude gibe on the part of the lower order of spectators, who greeted the procession as it passed with unequivocal demonstrations of hostility and contempt.

These indications of ill-will were at first manifested in a show of unrestrained levity, as little creditable to the feelings of the townsmen, on an occasion of so solemn a nature, as offensive to those against whom it was directed.

Bursts of loud laughter were accompanied with ribald jests and buffoonery of the most annoying character; and when Colonel Briggs at length, irritated beyond the bounds of the prudential patience which he had at first deemed it imperatively necessary to preserve under such intolerable provocations, bade the

unmannerly youngsters, who, according to custom, were the most forward in this species of outrage, beware of the whips of the riders and the broadswords of the troopers of the party, they replied to the threat with a general discharge of mud and stones, deliberately aimed at the faces of those who apparently occupied the most distinguished stations in the cavalcade.

Instant and severe reprisals were made by the insulted roundheads on such of the delinquents as came within the reach of whip, halbert, or broadsword. The whole order of the funeral was thrown into confusion, torches were extinguished, horses frightened, and rendered unmanageable, by the general and tumultuous onslaught of the hostile populace; riders were precipitated from their saddles, on the one hand, and women and children trampled under the chargers' hoofs of the enraged troopers, on the other, for the military part of the cavalcade, without waiting for the

orders of Colonel Briggs, had already faced about, and charged fiercely upon their assailants with drawn swords, without paying the slightest regard to sex or age.

Wild laughter and ribald raillery were now changed for the infuriate yells of vengeful wrath, the shrieks of pain, and the piercing outcries of female and infantine terror. Blood had been drawn by the troopers, and the townspeople, though in the first instance decidedly the aggressors, were eagerly desirous of retaliating to the utmost of their ability upon the unwelcome intruders, whose entrance into Kendal Church they appeared disposed to resist even to the knife.

Althea, who had during the life of her father, under his guardianship, accompanied the court after it had assumed a military character, to York, Oxford, and other garrison towns, at the commencement of the rebellion, and become, as she had imagined, fatally

familiar with the direful drama of civil war, was now surprised and startled at the frightful aspect which the fell demon of party wears among the lower orders of either side. The chivalrous sentiments that, generally speaking, pertain to men of high birth and gentle breeding, in many cases softening their deeds or veiling them in bright, though, perchance, delusive colours, lends a grace to their deeds ; but where the game is played by the rabble, its effect is indeed revolting ; and Althea saw that a loyal mob was not a whit less barbarous and aggressive in its licentious fury, than the fanatic hydra of faction, when roused and excited to murderous mischief.

When she left Calgarth Hall, she would not have credited the assertion of any person present, who should have predicted the possibility of the funeral of her deceased friend and kinswoman meeting with such a reception, in any Christian town, and she now

turned with horror and disgust from the brute crowd, who thus trampled with undisguised rancour on all the charities and decencies of life.

“I told cousin Bartholomew how it would be, Heph-siba, did I not?” said Mrs. Martha Briggs to her sister, “but he never was a man who listed to be guided by the discreet friends of his family, and now he’s like to pay the penalty of his headstrong folly in carrying the bones of that precious woman, his covenanting sister, into the town of these evil-minded Philistines.”

“A place, my worthy mistress, ever abhorred withal,” rejoined Kerenhappuch, taking up the word, “Kendal she always called a sort of spawn of bloody Babylon, with its papistical and prelatic idolatries and abominations.”

“I wis,” said Mrs. Heph-siba Briggs, “that the men of Kendal would na wax so bold against us, were they not assured of the

support of those desperate malignants, the Stricklands of Sizergh Tower, their popish neighbours, who were aye ready to back them in their godless brawling for King Charles, at all times and seasons."

"I'll be right glad, sister Hephseba, an' we get safe out of the hands of the barbarous people here, without having the bloody-minded cavalier, Sir Robert Strickland, and his unbeloved sons and brethren, with the men of Belial, their followers, bearing down upon us for our confusion, and carrying us off, perchance, to that stronghold of popish malignancy, Sizergh Castle, as the captives of their bow and spear."

"Ah," squalled Kerenhappuch, affecting to conceal her long, sharp visage, with her mourning-hood, "that were indeed a peril for the virgin daughters of t' covenant."

"My good woman," said Mrs. Martha Briggs, who was exceedingly annoyed at Kerenhappuch's imagining there could be any

cause for peculiar alarm on her part, "you are disturbing yourself and us very unnecessarily ; your age and personal appearance will sufficiently protect you from the perils which you anticipate."

"Age and personal appearance, quotha!" retorted the enraged waiting-woman, "some people, though they be gentlefolks, might look at themselves, before they undervalued the outward similitude of younger damsels."

"Younger damsels, forsooth!" exclaimed Mrs. Martha Briggs, forgetting the solemnity of funereal etiquettes, so far as to break into a sarcastic laugh, "how old do you reckon yourself, prythee?"

"I am, I believe, turned of—of—thirty," responded Kerenhappuch, reluctantly naming any specific period.

"Some twenty years, and upwards," rejoined Mrs. Martha Briggs, "and very ancient in appearance for that time of life. I

have known women of sixty of a much more youthful countenance."

"Women of sixty!" screamed the insulted spinster, "it is all rank persecution, which I didn't expect from a kinswoman of my dear dead lady, blessed saint that she was! I declare, it is enough to trouble her repose to hear her faithful handmaiden so treated;" here Kerenhappuch's ill-suppressed wrath found vent in an hysterical paroxysm.

"Good Lorjus!" exclaimed Mrs. Martha Briggs, raising her hands impatiently to her ears, "what a wofu' howling the old daffceck has skirled up, only because we don't consider her young and handsome enough to stand in jeopardy of the worst mistreatment that can befall a respectable woman. Aren't ye well-nigh demented, fair Mistress Woodville, with the screeching she's making?"

"I am accustomed to Mistress Cross-thwaite's infirmity," replied Althea, drily.

"If thee beest, bonny bird, 'tis more than

I am," observed Mrs. Hephseba, "my poor head is a-weary of her noise, and what with that and the branglement those Kendal carles are keeping up wi' colonel cousin, without, I'm beginning to wish myself stark deaf."

"I wonder what colonel cousin meant by boxing up a saucy ow'd waiting-woman in t' same coach wi' blood kinsfolk o' his own, gentlewomen born and bred," rejoined Mistress Martha Briggs.

"Sarcy ow'd waiting-woman, forsooth!" screamed Kerenhappuch. "I'd have you know, Mistress Consequence, that I think myself as good as anybody in this coach, and a far better Christian withal, and I'll tell the colonel of your despiteful mention of his arrangements for my blessed lady's funeral, so I will, as soon as I can get the speech of him."

Colonel Briggs had enough to do just then to keep the townsmen at bay, so resolutely deter-

mined were they not to allow their venerable church to be desecrated by burial according to the puritan fashion. They had made a barricade across the street, and were bent on turning the procession back.

“There’s nothing to be done with the perverse fools, but charging them with our broadswords,” said he to Bethuliel. “I wish we were not pestered with a coach full of women, they are always in the way.”

An exulting shout from the hostile party announced the approach of a loyal reinforcement.

“T’ Stricklands are coming, t’ Stricklands are coming! Hurrah for t’ bra’ holly tops o’ Sizergh! Down w’ Briggs an’ his round-heads; sweep ’em aw clean owt o’ Kandel!”

Alexander Henderson, Hugh Peters, and the other puritan divines, knowing themselves to be marked men, and suspecting there would be more fighting than preaching, slipped adroitly out of the cavalcade, leav-

ing Elkanah Nobbs without a rival, and made for the northern road, with which they were well acquainted, and scarcely looked behind them till they were safe at Low Gill. Thus they escaped the perils of the fierce conflict, which appeared inevitable between their roundhead friends and the cavaliers; but the threatening collision was averted by the mediation of Squire Thistlethwaite, and several other of the Westmoreland worthies, among the numerous friends and relatives of the deceased, who so successfully pleaded to Sir Robert Strickland the respect due to the memory of Mrs. Kezia Briggs, that he ordered the excited mob to allow her remains to be carried into the church, where they were silently deposited in the family vault.

As Althea slowly and sorrowfully left the church, she saw, and was recognized by Philipson, sitting on horseback, under the lamp of an opposite gateway. He raised his plumed-hat, and bowed low to her as the

coach passed, with an expression of the deepest interest and sympathy.

Althea covered her face with her handkerchief, and wept passionately during her homeward journey

CHAPTER VI.

COLONEL BRIGGS, when he assisted Althea to leave the coach on their melancholy return to Calgarth Hall, informed her that, out of consideration for her comfort and maidenly ideas of propriety, he had invited his worthy kinswomen, Mistress Hephseba and Mistress Martha Briggs, to take up their abode for the present at his house to bear her company. Althea availed herself of this opportunity of representing to him the inconvenience and distress she suffered from the continued absence of her maid, and even condescended to entreat him to permit her return.

“No,” replied Briggs, doggedly; “she is a

very graceless person, whom I had cogent reasons for dismissing from your service at Garstang. Nevertheless, she made her way to Calgarth with all the confidence in life, insomuch that she was here the very morning after our arrival, and you beguiled my sister into allowing her to remain, despite of me, under deceitful promise of discreet behaviour. Instead of which she well-nigh turned the heads of two of my troopers with her coquetry, so that they fought with broadswords for her sake, by the Troutbeck. She infected all my maidens with her vain fashions, held private meetings and dealings with Merab, the witch of the lake, and assisted, as you well know, in spiriting you away to the Long Holme, on the night of the third Sabbath in May, when you ought both to have been at evening worship in my chapel ; and she is now living, I suppose, in very unseemly fashion in the Holme House, with her friend Robert Philipson. I tell thee nay, cousin Althea ; I can-

not in conscience permit the second entrance of so improper a person into my covenanting household."

"It is a sore hardship to be deprived of my bower maiden," returned Althea. "I wis my mother never dreamed of my being reft of suitable female attendance."

"Have you not the company and services of that godly woman, Kerenhappuch Cross-thwaite, my late sister's maid?"

"Name her not," replied Althea; "she is the most odious and disobliging person I ever saw, and the most useless withal; she can neither turn a ringlet, plait a braid, nor place a feather; she knoweth not how to lace a boddice, draw a tucker, clasp a necklace, or button a ruffle; she cannot so much as tie a bow fit to be seen. All she can do is to taunt and rail. I would you had heard how unbecomingly she spake to your two kinswomen and myself in the coach."

"Verily, cousin Althea, it riles me to hear

that my late sister's faithful servant is in such evil odour with thee and them ; but there is no help for it ; thou must make the best thou canst of her, and take patience till after our marriage, when haply some of the ladies of the covenant may recommend a more pleasant maiden for thy chamberer," said Briggs.

Althea shuddered at the allusion to the marriage, and hastily retreated to her own chamber, declaring that she would wait upon herself in preference to being subjected to the intrusion and insolence of Kerenhappuch.

The same evening, after the guests had supped and withdrawn, Mr. Serjeant Bemington of Appleby, a learned civilian attached to the cause of the parliament, an old friend and kinsman of the Briggs family, being left alone with the colonel, drew forth a sealed parchment, endorsed "The last Will and Testament of me, Kezia Briggs, of Calgarth Hall, in the county of Westmoreland, spinster."

“Ha!” cried the colonel, with a look of surprise, “did my sister really take the unnecessary trouble of making a will?”

“She did,” replied the serjeant, “and intrusted the same to my care. Will you be pleased to hear it?”

Briggs gave an ungracious nod of assent, having a shrewd suspicion, though well assured of the affection of the testator, that the disposal of her property would not be in his own favour.

The will, stripped of its technical terms and prolixity, after reciting certain small legacies to her dearly beloved brother, Colonel Bartholomew Briggs, and her dear cousin, Mistress Althea Woodville, of Lancefield Court, in the county of Shropshire, as memorials of her affection, and securing life annuities to the Reverend Master Elkanah Nobbs, her chaplain, and to Kerenhappuch Crossthwaite, her waiting-woman, and other of the old servants at Calgarth Hall, proceeded to devise

the rest of her property, real and personal, to the amount of twelve thousand pounds, to her cousin twice removed, Robert Philipson, Esquire, of the Long Holme Island, Windermere, in the county of Westmoreland.

“To whom?” asked Briggs, in astonishment.

“To Robert Philipson, of Long Holme,” repeated the serjeant, “not out of respect or regard for his person, character, or political principles, she distinctly states, but as an act of justice, which she, the daughter of the late Bartholomew Briggs, feels herself called in conscience to perform towards the son of the late Edward Philipson, of the Long Holme, who had been materially shorn of his inheritance by the unjust will made by Sir Percy Philipson, his father, in favour of the said late Bartholomew Briggs, his nephew; therefore she, the testator, requests her said kinsman, Robert Philipson, to receive the sum of twelve thousand pounds, which she herewith gives

and bequeaths to him as restitution of some portion of the Philipson property unjustly devised by his grandfather in favour of her late father."

"I'll swear that Kezia was not of sound mind when this libel on our father's memory was compounded!" exclaimed Colonel Briggs, making an ineffectual snatch at the parchment.

"Softly, neighbour Briggs; no summary proceedings, if you please," said Serjeant Bemington. "The will, though unluckily in favour of that most troublesome person commonly called "Robin the Devil," by those who deal in libellous language, is a good will, drawn and engrossed in my presence by Attorney Jackson, from the lady's own draught, and is duly signed and executed by herself, and attested by three credible witnesses; and as such, must stand good in the eye of the law."

"I will bring witnesses to prove her insanity," cried Briggs.

“ The *non-compos* plea won’t answer, colonel, I assure you,” replied the serjeant; “ my conscience will compel me to testify that my late friend, Mistress Kezia Briggs, was one of the clearest-headed persons in the county, and at the time she thought proper to mention this legacy ; and I took the liberty of questioning the propriety of a lady zealously affected to the good cause bequeathing so considerable a sum to a noted malignant, she used such logical arguments in defence of her act and deed, that I could not rebut them. And between you and me, colonel, it is but a small shred given back to young Philipson out of that which, if every one had their own——”

“ I don’t understand your insinuations, Mr. Serjeant,” interrupted Briggs, angrily.

“ My good friend, you know on how ticklish a title you hold Calgarth Hall and manor ; and I advise you, instead of disputing your sister’s will, to pay the legacy, and make an

amicable settlement, if you can, with that desperate fellow, your cavalier kinsman, in peril of whose vengeance I would not stand for twice the money your conscientious sister has thought it incumbent on her to leave him."

"I'll see him in the pit of Tophet first, and share the same fate myself, if ever I suffer him to touch a groat of it!" exclaimed Briggs, furiously.

"Tut, tut! neighbour Briggs," replied the sergeant, "you cannot help yourself. The money is left in trust to me, which I have solemnly accepted as the executor of my late friend, Mistress Kezia, and am bound to carry the provisions of her will into effect."

"Unless, Mr. Serjeant, you will oblige me by committing this vexatious piece of folly to the flames?"

"Impossible, colonel! My legal character and my honour are both concerned," replied the serjeant.

“ You cannot help yourself, if I violently wrest it from you, and dispose of it according to mine own convenience ?”

“ I take leave to differ from you on that point, colonel,” replied the serjeant ; “ and if I mistake not strangely,” continued he, rising and drawing up his gladiatorial form to its full height, and putting himself into an attitude of defence, “ I shall be able to maintain myself against your aggression. You know my reputation of old as a wrestler, and if you like to try a fall with me, I’m your man.”

“ No, Serjeant Bemington ; it is not in my way,” said Briggs, drawing a pistol from his belt, cocking it, and pointing it at his opponent ; “ but this is, and I tell you plainly I mean to have that paper from you, cost what it may.”

“ Then I shall have to act on the original draught, in the veritable handwriting of the testatrix,” observed the serjeant, coolly.

“Are there no terms on which these documents might be suppressed?” asked Briggs.

“Do you take me for a cutpurse, or a knavish attorney, Master Briggs, that you insult me with such felonious overtures?” exclaimed the serjeant, indignantly. “I tell you,” continued he, “it is well for you that you have firearms in your grasp, or I should have entered an action of battery on your ugly phiz. Your sister proved herself a woman of sound judgment by entrusting her will to a lover of moral as well as legal justice, or her intentions would have been frustrated either by fraud or force.”

“Have you a mind to be hanged over my drawbridge, Bemington?” demanded Colonel Briggs, passionately.

“Of course not; neither do I fear you will risk your own neck by inflicting such a doom, for I belong to the winning side as well as yourself,” replied the serjeant, calmly.

“ May Sathanas confound you for an impenetrable puppy, whom there is no managing either by fair means or foul ! ” exclaimed Briggs, angrily.

“ I cry you mercy, neighbour Briggs ! ” rejoined the serjeant, laughing. “ What may be your fair means I know not, for those you have as yet tried are passing foul.”

“ It has been your own fault, then, serjeant,” growled Briggs, “ for I told you to name your own terms for destroying this memorial of superannuated folly. I would not hesitate to say one-third of the sum specified. Nay, never look so black upon it, Bemington. We have been old friends, and I would rather divide the whole with you than that pestilent fellow, Robert Philipson, should receive the benefit of one farthing of my sister’s money, which of right belongs to me, as her natural heir.”

“ Colonel Briggs, ” said the serjeant, proudly, “ I must remind you that you have

no necessitous villain to tamper with, but a man who esteems a spotless name and a sound conscience above all price. I was once very near calling you brother through a marriage with the deceased in our younger days, which was foolishly broken off through some stiffness on her part, as you may remember, in refusing to go to the county ball when I was pricked down as high sheriff for Westmoreland ; but she was the only woman I ever loved, and for her sake I shall not expose your conduct in regard to her will, but do my duty as her executor fearlessly, and to the best of my power. And so, good morning to you, for the small hours have begun to strike, and we have had a weary day of it ; first with the long formal orations of the ministers ; secondly, with the slow dismal ride to Kendal, and the brutish behaviour of the *rascaile* mob ; then the sorrowful business of laying her precious remains in the vault, without one word of hope or comfort as to assurance of a joyful

resurrection; thirdly, our return hither, through rain and fog; and last and worst of all, this business of unfolding the contents of her last will and testament to you at the imminent peril of having my brains blown out, to say nothing of your hospitable threat of hanging me over your draw-bridge."

"There is a bed prepared for you, Be-mington, if you choose to sleep," growled Briggs.

"Is it at the bottom of Windermere, colonel?" asked the serjeant, laughing.

"It is in a comfortable, warm room, in the west gallery, between the chambers of my two maiden cousins, Heph-siba and Martha Briggs, if you think proper to occupy the same; but one would think, by your insinuation just now, you were afraid of having your throat cut if you slept under the shadow of my roof."

"Not a bit of it, for you would gain

nothing by it. This is only a copy of your sister's will, after all ; the original is in safe keeping for the present, so I may safely avail myself of your comfortable offer of the warm bedroom, for I am too tired to go further till I have slept."

CHAPTER VII.

AT the end of a week, Mrs. Hephsiba and Mrs. Martha Briggs found themselves so weary of the unbroken monotony and gloom of Calgarth Hall, and the disobliging manners of the great man of the family, Colonel Briggs, that they complained of indisposition from the damp air of the lake, and insisted on returning to their own snug little house at Ulverstone.

The loss of their society, dull as it was, increased the melancholy of Althea's sojourn in this castle of despair. But the stagnation of spirit into which she was disposed to sink was suddenly broken the day

after their departure by an intimation from Colonel Briggs which, though dreaded, she had not expected so soon after his sister's death.

They had dined *tête-à-tête* in the small western parlour—the chaplain, who had walked to Bowness, being absent. As soon as the cloth was removed and the servants withdrawn, Colonel Briggs swallowed a deep draught of canary, and offered to fill Althea's glass.

“Excuse me,” she said; “I drink no wine.”

He repeated his own potation, and she rose to retire.

“Whither away so quickly?” asked he.

“There is a gleam of wintry sunshine on the Troutbeck Hills,” replied Althea, “and I would fain take a walk before it is withdrawn.”

“I cannot allow you to ramble beyond the park,” said he.

“ I shall not attempt to do so,” she replied, moving towards the door as she spoke, as if eager to make her escape. Colonel Briggs swallowed a third bumper, and then, in a voice that made her tremble, exclaimed :

“ Tarry ; I have somewhat to say to you.”

“ It is getting late ; I shall lose the beauty of the afternoon,” said Althea, putting her hand on the latch of the door.

“ Tarry,” he repeated, “ and honour me with your attention, madam.”

Althea paused, but stood with an averted face.

“ Turn about, and look at me,” cried Briggs.

She mechanically obeyed. He fixed his eyes upon her with an expression of sullen determination that sent the lifeblood from her cheek and lip, as he said :

“ Althea Woodville, I demand the instant fulfilment of your promise to become my wife.”

“ Impossible !” gasped Althea, sinking

down upon a chair, and regarding him with a look of unutterable dismay.

“Is it thus thou dost observe thy solemnly plighted word to become my wife at any time it should please me to appoint?” exclaimed Briggs, starting from his seat, and confronting her. “Wist I not well thy shuffling, faithless temper when I spake of detaining thy minion as hostage for the performance of thy promise? for had I done so, thou durst not have put his life in jeopardy by an attempt to baffle me.”

“Colonel Briggs,” replied Althea, “I am neither false nor perjured.”

“Do you not refuse to perform your part of the contract, when mine has been so long fulfilled?” said Briggs.

“I have not yet refused,” replied Althea; “but you spoke of instant compliance.”

“I did so.”

“Then you surely do not, cannot mean it in the literal sense of the words?”

“ In the most literal sense of application—in plain words, Althea Woodville, our espousals must be solemnized at six o’clock to-night.”

“ This night, this very night ?” shrieked Althea.

“ Yea, madam, this very night,” replied he, swallowing another goblet of wine.”

“ Nay, but it cannot be ! It is only the eighth evening after your sister’s funeral.”

“ Do you suppose my memory is so short that I have forgotten that circumstance ?” asked Briggs, sarcastically.

“ For the sake of decency and natural affection, one would think so,” returned Althea.

“ Hark ye, madam,” rejoined Briggs, “ that is a matter which concerneth myself alone, and if I have recently lost mine only sister, the greater is my need of a wife to supply her place at the head of my household.”

“ Barbarian !” exclaimed Althea, turning

away with a look of ineffable disgust, "is it thus you name a sister as noble and estimable as you are the reverse? Her only fault was her affection for you, unworthy as you are of the love of any one."

"Althea Woodville, no more of this aggravating folly," interrupted Briggs; "but answer me this plain question, Was your promise to become my wife at mine own time conditional or positive?"

"It was positive," replied Althea, shuddering, "but, Colonel Briggs, you will not, you cannot chose so unseemly a time for its fulfilment."

"I both can and will," said he, doggedly; "for, in good truth, I consider the business is a disagreeable business, and the sooner it is got over the better it will be for us both."

Althea threw herself at his feet, with clasped hands and streaming eyes.

"Colonel Briggs," exclaimed she, "cousin, guardian, for the sake of my departed mother

for the sake of your blessed sister, have pity upon me, and grant me at least a brief respite."

"I give you till six this evening to make your preparations," he replied, without paying the slightest regard to her passionate supplication, and left her.

CHAPTER VIII.

SCARCELY conscious of what she did, Althea rose from the ground, and flinging a cloak round her, hurried into the garden ; nor was she aware whither her rapid steps had carried her till she found her further progress barred by the lake. She shuddered and drew back, for she was standing on the very spot where she had held such fearful communings with herself that well-remembered night on which she had first been summoned by Colonel Briggs to prepare for the accomplishment of these abhorred nuptials. The vital current flowed backward to her heart as she recollected the sinful attempt which had been

frustrated by the providential interposition of her deceased kinswoman, Mrs. Kezia Briggs. She trembled as she asked herself what mysterious attraction had drawn her steps in this climax of mental misery to the self-same spot. She turned about with a strong effort and walked away, without daring to cast another glance on the deep, calm waters, for she felt a strange impulse prompting her to plunge herself forward to seek a fancied refuge from the horror of her doom.

The temptation seemed indeed to return upon her in this dark moment with no less power than on that dreadful night, but the words of her departed friend recurred to her mind, as if to reprove the sinfulness of her despair. She hurried from the lake side, and struck into the gloomy vista of yew trees, whose sombre shades appeared in keeping with the dreary aspect of her destiny and melancholy feelings. She had already twice traversed the funereal colonnade with agitated

steps, and was about to bend her course mechanically homeward—if Calgarth Hall could indeed be termed her home—when her tearful glance was suddenly attracted by the fascination of an eye watching her with steadfast attention, and the next moment she, with a start of surprise, perceived Merab seated at the foot of one of the pyramid-cut yew trees, so fixed and motionless in her attitude, that but for the glitter of those large supernatural-looking eyes, Althea might have passed and repassed many times without observing her.

The epithet of “the witch of the lake,” which Briggs had used with reference to this wild, mysterious being, recurred to Althea’s memory, and thrilled her frame with a feeling allied to terror, as Merab advanced and confronted her so unexpectedly at that lonely spot.

“The clouds bear away to the east, fair lady,” said she. “I am thinking we shall

have a bright sunset, and a fair day to-morrow."

"Is that all your saying?" returned Althea, in an accent which betrayed more disappointment than she wished to be apparent to the sybil.

"I could have said more, proud beauty, but you call me an evil prophetess; albeit, the evil is not the work of the revealer thereof," said Merab.

"Away!" exclaimed Althea, "you have deceived me with an augury of double meaning. All the anguish that oppresses me in this dark hour is the result of listening to one who deals with familiar spirits."

"Did I ever tell you that my prediction applied to the scowl-browed roundhead yonder? Was it not yourself gathered false hopes, by fitting the augury to your own wishes?" said Merab.

"Alas!" returned Althea, "to me you have been in the place of that which you

resemble—an evil angel. Men call you the witch of the lake.”

“So called they my mother before me, and yet they belied her foully,” replied Merab, calmly, folding her cloak about her, and preparing to depart. “Farewell, proud lady, you distrust and have taunted me; you have broken the all-powerful and mysterious link of sympathy which drew me to you in your hour of need to tell you——”

“Tell me only how to escape the frightful destiny that threatens me!” exclaimed Althea.

“Ay, you should fulfil your pledge to the gloomy man of the hall, this bright evening,” said Merab, fixing her penetrating eyes on Althea’s face.

Althea groaned, and smote her breast in agony.

“And what,” asked Merab, “have you done to avert the thing that you so greatly dread?”

“ Alas !” returned Althea, “ I have alternately wept, entreated, reasoned, taunted, and humbled my pride to the dust, in the vain hope of moving his iron nature. I have knelt at his feet, and implored for delay, but he remained indomitable.”

“ Well, then, listen to me. You have tried the eloquence of prayers, tears, reason, and scorn, and strong supplications, with your affianced husband, fruitlessly, for to all these things he is inaccessible ; there is no soft spot in the self-incrusted adamant of his heart for you to touch. Anon, he shall summon you to his conventicle to plight your troth ; you shall not refuse to go, for it would be unavailing, you shall do better, you shall demand a priest of your own Church to perform the ceremonial of making you man and wife. ‘ This,’ you shall say, ‘ for conscience sake,’ and he cannot refuse to grant your demand ; for his own sake he will not, as it will give him a secure title to your fair

heritage, by means of a legally-solemnized marriage."

A bright colour suffused Althea's pallid cheek at the unexpected hope this suggestion infused into her heart, but the next moment it faded, as she dejectedly replied :

"Of what avail to me will be the reprieve of one poor hour, for no longer will it take him to procure a clergyman from one of the neighbouring villages, I trow."

"I tell thee, lady," said Merab, "that Briggs, the rebel to his king, and persecutor of the church, shall not find a priest to bless his nuptials, and join his hand with the reluctant heiress of the cavalier. Courage, faint heart, and dash the tears from thine eyes. Look the man Briggs bravely in the face, and let thy word be, 'a priest of mine own Church!' Ay, ring it in his ears, till he is aweary of the sound. Where shall he find the pastors whom he and his persecuting party have driven from their churches and

their homes? Let him look for them in the gloomy recesses of Ingleborough, and others of the mountain caves, where they skulk like foxes in their dens. Ha! ha! he has prepared all things for his bridal, but the dark-haired bride shall not rest on his pillow to-night, nor her broad lands be added to his wealth. You shall outwit him for the present, at least, bonny bird, and through the counsel of her whom you have called your evil angel."

"My good genius, rather," said Althea, with a dimpling cheek. "Forgive my petulance and unkind distrust, and accept this trifle as a token of my gratitude," continued she, trying to press her well-filled purse into the sybil's hand.

"I will none of it," exclaimed Merab, drawing haughtily back. "Give it to your betrothed yonder, and bid him fall down and adore the golden images he worships. But what is gold to me? If I were indeed 'the

witch of the lake,' as you have called me, could I not take my divining rod in my hand and discover the forgotten treasures that lie hidden in desolate places, and make them mine own? But gold, though potent, is not like knowledge—power; neither will it buy love, no, not one glance of the bright blue eyes that are now turned from yon willow-fringed shore of the Long Holme towards Calgarth Hall, because it is your abiding place."

Althea started at the allusion, and turned her eyes with an anxious look of inquiry on Merab.

"Ha!" exclaimed Merab, "have I betrayed my weakness? Oh, fool that I was, not to strive against it with all the energies of my nature, instead of entwining the fibres of my heart round mortal man, when from the first I saw my own dark destiny in the star-written pages of the blue vault signed round with crosses."

“ Who and what are you ?” asked Althea.

“ The daughter of an astro-physician,” replied Merab, “ a man versed in celestial science, little understood by the dull clods, his neighbours, who, because he foretold eclipses, comets, and other phenomena, and calculated nativities, called him, in their coarse language, ‘ the cunning-man,’ and came to consult him with gifts in their hands, on every small matter that perplexed them, even if they lost or mislaid a silver-spoon. Fools and gulls that they were !”

“ And your mother ?”

“ She was the native of a brighter clime. My father, when a student at Salamanca, met and loved her, the dark-eyed daughter of his tutor, a sage of Hebrew descent, with all the learning and mysticism of his race. He was accused of practising magic, and was burned at an *auto da fé*. My mother fled with my father to England. They married, and lived in a wild glen, near Graythwaite, where he

had inherited a small tenement and estate. I was their only surviving offspring, and early delighted in occult studies, and understood my father's learned books, globes, and astrolabes. They were my only pastime and delight. My mother warned me 'that I was treasuring up woe for myself by the acquisition of forbidden knowledge. No good,' she said, 'ever dwelt with the spirit of divination.' She bade me spin, knit, or sew, like other maidens, and be happy like them; but in such pursuits I had no pleasure, nor could I bring my mind to companionship with the young and light-minded. My pleasure was to scale the steep brow of the mountain, or to skim the surface of the lake, free and unfettered as a bird of the air. Those were happy days—but I will be brief. My father died, and my mother was accused of witchcraft, and doomed by a brutal and ignorant crew of barbarous people to the flames, and I, her only child, was to witness that dreadful

sight, for they had bound me with cords, and cast me upon the ground, making sport of my agony, with fiendish glee. It was then that Robert Philipson, who was to me a stranger at that time, came with a brave company of his followers, unexpectedly to our aid, rescued my mother from their cruel hands, cut my bonds with his sword, and restored us to each other. But our peaceful home had been violated and pillaged, and we became houseless wanderers for a season. At length we returned to the abode which had been endeared to us by so many precious associations; not long after I found a gentleman, badly bruised, bleeding, and insensible, at the foot of a crag, whence he had fallen in hunting, and in him I recognised our brave and generous preserver, Robert Philipson, of the Long Holme. His hurts were painful and dangerous, but my mother's knowledge of the healing art enabled us to play the surgeon and the nurse with good effect,

though it was long ere he was able to remove. No mother ever kept watch by the couch of her sick infant more patiently and tenderly than I did beside his pillow, during his suffering and weakness. How those sufferings, and his dependence on my care endeared him to my heart, I will not say."

"And he?" exclaimed Althea, in trembling agitation.

"No, lady, no, he never sought the unvalued love of one like me," said Merab; "nor did he ever dream I dared to feel it unsought, but when we parted he gaily thanked my mother and me for our kind tendance, and proffered us gold, as if our services could be thus repaid."

"Where is your mother now?" asked Althea, tenderly.

"In the grave," replied Merab, in a deep, hoarse voice. "She died soon after the circumstance of which I have just told you, leaving me alone, yea, a disjointed link in

the great chain of life, with nothing to bind me to it with the ties of human affection. The only sympathies I feel are for Robert Philipson, and for you, because you are beloved by him who never can be mine. There is an immutable decree against it, even though you existed not. It is only in the land of spirits that he and I can meet in love, for there we all shall love. Here the curse of my mother's people is upon me, a doom of wrath, which makes us a separate people, aliens, and wanderers in all lands. How then can I ever exalt myself as otherwise than the wretch I am? Ha! weep you for me, fair and noble lady; I cannot weep for myself; I have no tears—I never had. Yet you say, in your impatient waywardness, there is no sorrow like yours. See now whether you would exchange your lot with mine. You, the fair, the wealthy, the noble, and beloved, you are the garden rose, which attracts every eye, and whose

sweetness tempts the rude as well as the gentle hand to cull it; but I am as the wayside poppy, trampled upon, and scorned by all."

CHAPTER IX.

THE clangour of the supper bell broke up the conference, Merab glided away in silence, and Althea, whose name had been loudly proclaimed through the garden glades, turned to re-enter the hall. She encountered Colonel Briggs on the threshold, preparing to go himself in search of her, and enforce her return.

“How now, madam!” said he, “what makes you abroad so late this cold evening? I must endeavour to discover what peculiar charm the garden has of late possessed for you.”

“A very considerable one, in my opinion, that of your absence,” replied Althea, coolly

passing him, and endeavouring to make her way to her own apartment.

“ Hold,” said he, obstructing her passage, “ let me lead you into the banqueting-room. Elkanah Nobbs and I have been waiting supper for you this half-hour.”

“ I cannot eat to-night,” observed Althea, entering the drawing-room, and warming her hands at the peat fire, which glimmered through the darkness.

Colonel Briggs followed her, lighted the clustering wax-lights in the massive silver sconces on the chimney-piece, and asked her if she were aware of the hour.

“ It is, I believe, a matter of little importance here,” replied she, carelessly, looking at her watch. “ I believe I forgot to wind it last night,” continued she, commencing the operation.

Colonel Briggs pointed emphatically to the dial on the antique chimney-piece for her to note the precise time.

She paid no attention to the hint, except to set her watch to the right moment as there indicated, and replaced the jewelled toy by her side.

“ It lacks but twenty minutes and a half to *six*,” observed he, slowly syllabling out the words, and laying a strong emphasis on the last.

“ You should apply for the post of captain of the city watch, my worthy guardian,” said Althea, “ for you appear well qualified to perform the duties of that office. But, I cry you mercy, you and Master Nobbs are still fasting. I pray you sup, without further care for me, which is but vain ceremony, I do assure you.”

She assumed an air of provoking levity, to conceal her inward perturbation, while the painful throbbings of her heart were audible to herself, and she feared every moment would become so to her watchful and observant guardian.

“Althea Woodville, have you completed your preparations?” demanded he, in an authoritative tone.

“Preparations, sir?” returned she, with affected simplicity. “I have no preparations to make.”

“Then I am to conclude that you are arrayed in your wedding garments, and ready to accompany me to the chapel; yet, methinks white were more befitting for the occasion,” said Colonel Briggs.

“I wear black for my father, for my mother, and for your sister. I cannot change it till my year of mourning be expired,” replied she, with a quivering lip.

“You mean, you will not,” rejoined he, gloomily.

“Only wait the proper time which decency requires, and I will engage to wear white satin and silver; nay more, to embroider you a vest of the same with mine own hands,” cried Althea, with great animation.

Briggs eyed her with an inquisitorial glance, not being able to account for the strange alteration in her manner.

“Thank you,” said he; “but I do not affect such vain fopperies for mine own wearing. As for yours, I suppose I must e’en take you as you are for the eschewing of inconvenient delay.”

Althea stood playing with the trinkets that hung from her watch-chain, apparently unconscious of his scrutiny, save that a brighter tint of colour than usual varied her complexion; but under that semblance of indifference how fearful was the agitation that shook her frame!

She again reminded her guardian that neither himself nor his chaplain had supped.

“I am beholden for your careful thought of our creature comforts,” said he; “but I will postpone supper till after our contract of matrimony be accomplished.”

Althea’s cheek faded and her heart died

within her at these words. Briggs now rang the bell.

“Is the chapel lighted up?” inquired he.

“As bright as Candlemas,” was the reply.

“Candlemas, fellow!” exclaimed Briggs, in a sarcastic tone. “Let me never hear that abominable popish word again. Bid one of the maidens summon Kerenhappuch to attend her lady in the chapel and hold her gloves.”

“Colonel Briggs, I made no promise to receive Kerenhappuch into my service,” said Althea, “and I refuse her attendance.”

“I’ll suffer no jiltflirts about my wife,” growled he.

“Wait till you possess a legal right to dictate,” returned Althea.

“A few minutes will invest me with that prerogative,” said Colonel Briggs, as the clock struck the appointed hour and the chapel bell began to chime.

He offered his arm to Althea to lead her to the chapel.

She accepted it without further manifestation of reluctance than an involuntary shudder, and allowed him, to his own surprise and that of the assembled household, to conduct her to a table covered with crimson velvet in the centre of the chapel, beside which stood Elkanah Nobbs in a new black silk Geneva cloak and skull-cap, with lawn collar, bands, and cuffs of unusual depth and stiffness, in readiness to perform the matrimonial rite. This he was about to preface by an extempore sermon from Solomon's Song, in the composition of which he had been labouring from the moment he understood it was his patron's intention to enter into the holy estate of wedlock.

Colonel Briggs rudely interrupted him, in the act of giving out his text, with the imperative mandate :

“ Proceed to the contract of matrimony in

as few words as possible, and join my hand with that of this woman without delay !”

Althea drew back.

“Colonel Briggs,” said she, “I cannot be married unless by a duly authorized priest of the Church of England.”

Elkanah Nobbs responded to this stiff-necked declaration, as he termed it, with a look of consternation and a deep groan.

“A truce to such vain and unseasonable superstition !” exclaimed Colonel Briggs. “Master Nobbs will make us as fast man and wife as any cassocked priest in Christendom.”

“We think differently on that point,” replied Althea, “and I never will submit to become a party in any marriage that is not solemnized according to the form appointed in the liturgy of my own Church.”

“Hearken, O daughter, and consider,” began Elkanah Nobbs. But he could get no further in an exhortation which he had

intended to be very convincing to the perverse bride, whom he had never imagined could take such a whim into her head as to refuse his ministration at her marriage with his patron; and her doing so appeared to him as even a more extraordinary fact than her condescending to enter the chapel peaceably on the present occasion, which he, Elkanah Nobbs, had predicted she never would be prevailed upon to do.

“Althea Woodville,” said Colonel Briggs, regarding her with a gloomy scowl, “this is neither more nor less than a base subterfuge to evade the fulfilment of your promise to become my wife.”

“But you, it seems, Colonel Briggs, deign the daughter of Sir Lionel Woodville no greater honour than that of becoming your concubine, forsooth, by enforcing her to the mockery of a pretended form of marriage,” rejoined Althea, scornfully.

“Nay, listen, fair Mistress Woodville, and

be not perverse and stiffnecked in this matter," interposed the anxious chaplain.

"It would be to no purpose, believe me, Master Nobbs. My conscience will not permit me to view this matter in any other light," replied Althea.

"I guessed, from the manner of your behaviour before we entered the chapel, that you were devising some notable project for outwitting me and evading your solemn promise to become my wife," said Colonel Briggs.

"Your wife, Colonel Briggs, I cannot be unless we are united by a regularly ordained priest; and I am astonished at your supposing that I would submit to mine own dishonour by consenting to waive the holy rites which alone can render matrimony lawful and binding."

"That subterfuge, however cunningly devised, shall not serve your turn," returned Briggs, with a ghastly grin. "Here, Bethuliel, mount, with half a dozen of the troopers

well armed, and fetch in the steeple-house man of Bowness."

"Belike he may not choose to come hither on your worshipful honour's bidding," said Bethuliel.

"Did I tell you to ask him, fool?" replied Briggs. "Was not my order to fetch in the said priest of Baal, a most pestilent malignant he is! Make him thrust his prelatical mass-book into his pocket, and do you stuff his popish rag, the surplice, into your saddle-bag."

"Nay, verily your worshipful honour would not surely have such a filthy abomination brought into this clean tabernacle of covenanting people, to defile it and them with papistical and, what is worse, prelatical idols!" exclaimed Elkanah Nobbs.

Kerenhappuch uttered a deep groan, and Bethuliel was commencing an harangue on the unfitness of handling and, moreover, polluting his saddle-bag with so great an abomination as the said surplice, but was silenced by an

authoritative "Hold your peace, and be-gone!" from Colonel Briggs, and hastily vacated the chapel in the middle of a sentence.

Althea endeavoured to effect her escape by another door.

"Tarry the return of my messenger, sweet mistress!" exclaimed Briggs, seizing her arm. "If you leave this chapel except as my wife," continued he, "I should deserve to be pointed at by every daughter of Jezebel in the north for an errant dupe."

"Colonel Briggs, you have sorely pinched mine arm with your ungentle handling," cried she, seating herself, with a piteous look, on one of the benches, gladly availing herself of any excuse to account for the tremor of agitation which shook her frame, and the convulsive sob which, in spite of her intrepid demeanour, heaved her bosom; for, notwithstanding Merab's assurances, she felt her spirits sink as time wore away.

The female servants, with whom she was an especial object of interest, murmured and cast reproachful glances at their master. The clock struck seven, and finally eight. Elkanah proposed to pass away the time profitably by delivering a word on the subject of matrimony and the duties of wives, being, in fact, the sermon composed in honour of his patron's bridal ; but his patron, not being in the humour to listen to exhortations, uttered an impatient " Pish !" and silence was restored.

In half an hour Althea looked at her watch, and, turning to Colonel Briggs, said :

" I have taken no refreshment since dinner ; and being faint and weary, I should be glad to sup and retire to rest."

" Patience, my sweet bride," whispered he ; " thou shalt have all things necessary for thy contentation anon ; but lest thy spirits should, in the meantime fail with waiting for thy priest to bless our nuptials, Kerenhappuch shall fetch hither a volder with jellies, cakes,

sack spice, and other creature comforts in the shape of victual, for which I never knew you to crave before.”

“Do you suppose,” said Althea, “that I could be guilty of the sacrilege of eating and drinking in a place consecrated to religious purposes?”

“Vain popish scruples,” returned Briggs. “However, I leave you perfect liberty of conscience in the matter as to eating, drinking, or refraining ; only I do not allow those things to be made convenient pretexts for escaping from the chapel till we are man and wife.”

A weary period of unoccupied time followed this declaration. The clock struck eight, nine, and finally ten. The yawns of the sleepy congregation became audible and chorus-like from the mysterious sympathy which makes one yawn the parent of many.

Some degree of excitement was produced by Joseph Foxcraft, the butler, exclaiming : “T’skulls ! good lorjus, t’skulls !”

“Where, where be they?” cried the female servants, springing from their seats with a shrill outcry.

“Lo, you there! and there!” said Joseph, pointing to the black circles of tremulous smoke which played above the untrimmed cressets on the wall.

All rushed from their places. The panic now became general, and confusion ensued beyond the power of Elkanah Nobbs to calm or Colonel Briggs to suppress; for two skulls, gleaming with a blue, ghastly light, appeared on the crimson velvet cloth that covered the table prepared for the solemnization of the bridal, flanking the silver lamp which had been burning brightly there for the last four hours, but as if suddenly overpowered by the gloomy radiance proceeding from the skulls, went out with a horrible phosphoric smell. The women screamed and fled towards the door.

Colonel Briggs drew his broadsword and

made a sweeping pass with it towards the skulls, but they both sprang upwards in opposite directions and exploded like a pair of hand-grenades, scattering showers of burning fragments in all directions.

Althea was the only person present not terrified, for she plainly perceived it was an exploit of legerdemain, and that Joseph Foxcraft was the unsuspected conjuror by whose dexterity the pantomime was managed. The fact that an ancient cemetery, that had once occupied a portion of the park, had been discovered by him, had suggested the trick and withal given him unlimited command of the machinery of which he made such lavish use for the annoyance of his present master.

CHAPTER X.

THE clatter of horses' hoofs in the courtyard produced an instantaneous hush in the chapel.

“Ha, ha! they are back at last!” exclaimed Briggs, casting a triumphant glance at Althea.

The colour faded from her cheek and lip, and she pressed her clasped hands upon her breast to still its convulsive heaving. Steps now approached the chapel door, but evidently those of unsuccessful messengers. There is always brisk, buoyant quickness in the tread of those who have prospered in their mission; but these dull, heavy footfalls had a natural language which told of failure

before Bethuliel entered with a crest-fallen air, followed by the six troopers who had attended him on his expedition, yet without the reverend Hymen for whom he had been despatched, but, holding out before him at arm's length with a pair of tongs, to preserve his fingers from the pollution of coming in contact with what his master had called a popish rag, the white surplice of the parish church of Bowness.

“Fool!” exclaimed Briggs, angrily, “have you not brought the parson?”

“May it please your worshipful honour, nay,” replied Bethuliel, “for he was not to be found anywhere, though we searched every house in the parish, and his own twice over. Moreover we threatened his wife with hanging one of the children unless she disclosed his hiding-place; but though she whined a good deal about her young, she persisted in her malignant denial of knowing where her husband was hidden, so we captured this abomi-

nable garment of idolatry, and have brought it at thy desire. Amen."

"Why did not you proceed to Winsters and fetch in parson Scales?" demanded Briggs.

"May it like your honour, we did hunt for him; but verily all the priests of Baal have taken to holes and caves, and are not to be found," replied Bethuliel.

"Good-night, Colonel Briggs!" said Althea, with a low curtsy. "It will be of no use troubling me to come hither again on this errand till you have provided a priest." She then left the chapel without tarrying for a reply.

The following three or four days were occupied by Colonel Briggs in a fruitless search for a clergyman of the Church of England, to solemnize his nuptials with the fair heiress, whom he held in tantalizing captivity beneath his roof.

He now interdicted Althea from walking

either in the park or gardens, lest she might be a second time abducted by his reckless kinsman and undesirably near neighbour, at the Long Holme Island.

Althea retaliated on her guardian for these restrictions, by confining herself entirely to her own apartment, and refusing to appear at the family meals. In this state of unbroken solitude, without so much as the solace of a female attendant of her own to speak to, she continued for upwards of a week ; while her affianced bridegroom was scouring the country at the head of a company of troopers, in quest of an episcopalian clergyman. At the end of that time, his eager and hot parson chase having proved wholly unsuccessful, he changed his plans, and wrote civil letters to more distant members of the clerical body, requesting as a favour, and backing his request with golden offers of reward, that the reverend divine to whom he addressed himself, would courteously be

pleased to undertake a journey either to Calgarth Hall, Bowness, Ambleside, or even Cartmel Priory Church, to solemnize matrimony between him and a young lady who was under promise of marriage to him, but from scruples of conscience objected to any other form than that set forth in the book of Common Prayer. She also required the ministration of one of the clergy of the Church in the tenets of which she had been educated by her father, the late Sir Lionel Woodville, of Lancefield Court."

These applications not only caused a most vexatious delay, but entailed upon Briggs a series of voluminous replies from those who thought it necessary to offer prolix excuses and reasons for not obliging him. Some of the answers were satirical, others reproachful, and not a few jocose condolences on the dilemma in which he was involved; but one and all negatived his request.

There was no restriction which the reli-

gious professors of his party, with great propriety, imposed upon their military adherents, which Colonel Briggs was so often tempted to offend against, as the ordinance forbidding the violation of the third article of the Decalogue; his natural irascibility had been wont to vent itself in oaths and execrations from his youth upwards, whenever his tyrannical temper was thwarted; so that he felt the necessity of abstaining from this constitutional indulgence as a painful deprivation. But there were occasions on which he either could not or would not, refrain himself. The cool manner in which his ward and affianced bride had for the present outwitted him, so thoroughly exasperated him, that never did Goring and his reprobate company utter more profane language in the course of a long day, than he vociferated in one short half-hour after the perusal of every clerical denial he received to his applications for a clergyman of the Church of England to solemnize his nuptials with her.

Bethuliel, though well accustomed to his master's occasional backslidings, as he termed his explosions of temper, stood positively aghast at their frequency and uncontrollable violence on these occasions ; as for the chaplain, though his hair stood on end with horror to hear such Satanic expletives from his patron, he was positively too timorous to rebuke him, or offer remonstrances.

CHAPTER XI.

ALTHEA spent a joyless Christmas in the melancholy solitude of her own chamber, amusing herself as well as she could with her needlework and the books that had fortunately been packed in one of the trunks which were forwarded to Calgarth Hall from London, and thus escaped the destruction that had deprived her of everything she had brought from Garstang, her lute and music-books among the rest. Mrs. Kezia Briggs had, however, indulgently endeavoured to supply that loss by endowing her with an antique cithern, that had formerly belonged to her great grandmother, Alice Philipson

whose virginals, also, had been removed from the lumber-room to her apartment, during the absence of Colonel Briggs, and now proved a great resource to Althea.

The new year commenced with a heavy fall of snow, and the lake was frozen over, thus she was deprived of the excitement of watching for the boats from the Long Holme, which, although she had reason to believe Philipson was absent on service for the king, had hitherto been one of her occupations; sometimes a “*Mercurius Aulicus*,” was mysteriously smuggled into her room in the folds of her breakfast-napkin, through the good offices, as she shrewdly suspected, of Joseph Foxcraft, which greatly relieved the monotony of her life by enlightening her as to the state of public affairs, and helped to raise her spirits by informing her that the king’s cause was just then in the ascendant.

Short, however, was her satisfaction, for she had the mortification soon after, of learn-

ing from the excellent reports of “the Scotch Dove,” which Colonel Briggs sent her, with his compliments, one morning, by Joseph Foxcraft, that the Earl of Leven had crossed the border at the head of twenty-eight thousand men, to join the forces of the Parliament, in Yorkshire; that he had already advanced unopposed as far as Newcastle, and that his brother, Sir David Lesley, had taken possession of Carlisle, which he then occupied with two thousand men, for the purpose of awing the neighbourhood and preventing any further demonstrations in behalf of the king, from the malignants of that district; adding, that Carlisle itself, was well affected to the covenant.

“Can all this be true?” asked Althea, of Joseph Foxcraft, who had lingered to pile fresh peat on her dressing-room fire, and then sedulously commenced blowing it up with the small silver-faced bellows, which hung in the chimney-corner.

“ Yes, my leady, aw true !” replied he, in an under voice ; “ for there coomed a letter frae Carlisle, last neet to t’ colonel, frae t’ Scotch commander in ’sponce to privy letter a’ sent to t’ fause loon, by Bethuliel, and four o’ t’ troopers over t’ hills three days ago, to Carlisle, and we ha’ gotten twa Scotch attercraps now at t’ Haugh ’vouring as though they never could ha’ enoo o’ English beef ; but that is neither here nor there, only I’m fain to gi’ ye a hint, my leady, that six horses are ordered to travelling coach, and t’ colonel thinks to take ye t’ Carlisle, t’ day.”

“ To-day !” exclaimed Althea, becoming deadly pale, “ and for what purpose ?”

“ Weel, my leady, t’ colonel is in great haste to wed. Ey overheard him ask corporal MacCaul, one o’ t’ Scotch varmint frae Carlisle, if there were no church parsons to be got at in yon town ? And a’ answered and said : ‘ A muckle too mony, yer honour,’ quo’ t’ Scot. Then t’ colonel whispered

summut in his ear which ey guessed, by what followed, consarned performing the sarvice o' matrimony; for Scot said, 'There be twa or three o' thae fallows i' t' dungeons o' t' castle, and I'se warrant ye'll find one o' them will do it to save his craig; and i' colonel told him 'he'd gi' him ten broad pieces, if he would bring it so to pass that a church parson should be ready in Carlisle cathedral wi' book and surplice, to wed him to t' lady he would bring there to-morrow night!' "

"So soon!" exclaimed Althea, starting from her seat in dismay, "and is there no remedy, no help from the horror of that destiny?"

Joseph Foxcraft significantly pointed over his shoulder with his thumb, towards the Long Holme Island, then glided silently from the room.

He was almost instantly succeeded by Kerenhappuch, who entering abruptly, without so much as the customary ceremony of a

premonitory tap, informed Althea that it was Colonel Briggs's pleasure that she should prepare herself to accompany him to Carlisle, without delay."

"Tell Colonel Briggs, that I pray him to excuse me, for I am not well enough to undertake so long and cold a journey, at present," said Althea, sinking back in her chair. "For what purpose can he want to drag me, thither?" continued she.

"For a purpose which your bigotry prevents him from executing here, I suppose," returned Kerenhappuch, pertly.

"Leave my chamber, woman! and presume not to enter my presence again," replied Althea, sternly. "If I am compelled to hear such insulting language from your master, I will not bear it from one like you,"

"Marry, come up!" cried Kerenhappuch, exalting her voice to an angry scream. "Queen Jezebel herself could not have given prouder words to the prophets of old, before

her fall, and yet the dogs licked her blood, ay, and devoured her painted carcass."

" Silence, and begone !" exclaimed Althea.

" I hear the colonel's step on the stairs," cried Kerenhappuch, " and he won't suffer his blessed sister's faithful maiden to be treated so, he won't, oh, oh, oh !" She completed her annoyance by getting up a powerful fit of hysterics, which caused Althea to make some allowance for the contemptuous manner in which Colonel Briggs always spoke of that malady.

" To what purpose are you raising all this coil ?" shouted he, from the stairs ; for he had fallen into the mistake of attributing the screams that now invaded his ears, to Althea herself, not supposing that any other female in his house, could presume to resort to such means of ventilating either anger or mental distress ; but the loud and shrill key to which the notes rose, appeared at last so much beyond her physical powers of execution, that

he sent the housekeeper to inquire the cause of the disturbance.

“ May it please your worshipful honour !” replied the housekeeper, “ it is only Mistress Kerenhappuch Crossthwaite has skirled up a fit of high-strikes, with which she be much infected, ’specially since Master Nobbs hath clean forsaken her company, and her good lady left her less than she did expect.”

The allusion to his sister’s will put Briggs’s irascible temperament into so great an access of rage, that he shouted to Bethuliel to fling a pailful of water from the moat over the shrieking woman above stairs, unless she stinted of her noise, without delay. The mention of the prescription had the immediate effect of silencing Kerenhappuch’s wild cadences ; but before Colonel Briggs could utter a sarcastic congratulation on his success in curing hysterics, she had darted down-stairs with the speed of an enraged wild cat, and was standing by his side

demanding the payment of his sister's legacy, and the arrears of her wages, in language which might have provoked those proverbially deaf and insensible things, the stones in the streets, to answer her. Colonel Briggs hastened to write an order to his steward to pay her demand in full, and bade her instantly begone, and never to come within earshot of him again, under penalty of a halter, charging Bethuliel to thrust her out the moment she had received her money.

CHAPTER XII.

SCARCELY had the angry confusion of tongues which attended the expulsion of Kerenhap-puch from Calgarth Hall died away, when Colonel Briggs knocked at Althea's dressing-room door, and inquired "if she were ready to start?"

"Whither?" asked Althea, with affected indifference.

"With me to Carlisle," he replied.

"Colonel Briggs, I am not prepared to undertake so long a journey in this severe weather," returned Althea.

"The weather will not affect you, for you will travel in the coach, well wrapped up, of

course, and it is a fine day ; so prythee make no difficulties about it," said Colonel Briggs.

"If the paper you sent to me at breakfast reports truly, Carlisle is full of Scotch rebels, and I have no inclination to trust myself among them," rejoined Althea.

"You will be in no danger," said Colonel Briggs ; "we have a strong armed escort, and Sir David Lesley's safe-conduct."

"But I have no maid, and I can neither put up the things necessary for the journey, nor travel without a female attendant," rejoined Althea.

"You may take your choice of all the maidens in my household," said Colonel Briggs.

"They are not the sort of 'tire-women to whom I have been accustomed," replied Althea. "I cannot understand their dialect, and they do not comprehend my phraseology ; so I'll none of them."

"Then you must wait upon yourself, I

trow," said Briggs, bluntly ; "and I pray you to come forth without delay, for the coach is ready and the troopers mounted, and we are all tarrying for you."

"I am sorry for it ; but if you go to Carlisle to-day, Colonel Briggs, it must be without me," said Althea.

"It is useless resisting my will, Althea Woodville : you are wholly and entirely in my power ; and unless you would have me use absolute force to compel your compliance, you will put up your night-stuff quickly, and accompany me with a good grace," replied he, sternly.

Althea made no other answer than doubly locking her door.

"Childish folly," cried he ; "as if I could not order my carpenter to come and break open that door."

"Colonel Briggs, you pretend to revere the memory of my mother, your late aunt, who confided me to your protection ; for her sake

I conjure you not to treat me in so ruffianly a fashion," said Althea.

"It is not my wish to use rough measures, unless you compel me to proceed to extremities," returned Briggs; "but if you think to defy me in my own house, you will find yourself mistaken; so please to unlock the door, madam."

Althea, after a moment's hesitation, obeyed, and stood before him pale and motionless.

"Now put on your travelling-cloak and hood, and let me lead you to the coach," said he.

"I have not yet put up the things necessary for the journey," replied Althea.

"Well, do so without more loss of time."

With trembling hands she opened first one drawer and then another with an absent air, as if in quest of she knew not what.

"What are you looking for?" inquired he, impatiently stamping his foot.

"You have put it clean out of my head,"

said she, sitting down with a helpless perplexed look, and leaning her forehead on her hand.

“This is sheer grimace,” exclaimed Briggs. “You will never make me believe you are as stupid as you pretend.”

“I have a bad headache,” said she, turning her eyes piteously upon him ; “and I really cannot think of anything. I wis my father and mother never bred me up for a packer.”

Briggs now summoned his housekeeper. “Mistress Legget,” said he, “will you put up the things this lady will require for our journey to Carlisle?”

“I would be blithe to do it, gin the young lady win tell mey what she’ll lack, and where t’ things be,” replied the housekeeper, with a deep curtsy.

“I do not know myself,” said Althea, “nor wherefore I am to be dragged to Carlisle to-night.”

“To Carlisle to-neet?” echoed the house-

keeper. "Thou winna get there to-neet, my lady."

"Certainly not now," said Colonel Briggs ; "so much time has been wasted, that we shall have to sleep at Pooley Inn to-night. Put her night-stuff into a mail, and look up a white robe, veil, and gloves for her to wear at Carlisle to-morrow evening."

"For what purpose?" asked Althea.

"For our bridal," replied he.

"Good lack, t' bride looks more fit for her coffin!" ejaculated the housekeeper.

"Would that I were indeed lapped in my winding-sheet," rejoined Althea, weeping.

"The lady has neither white gloves nor white garments among her gear," said the housekeeper to Colonel Briggs ; "nowt but *dule*."

"The fitter for me," observed Althea ; "unless you could make ready my grave-clothes."

Though the compassionate housekeeper was

almost as tardy in her operations as Althea herself could have desired, they were at last completed under the terror of the Colonel's presence, who with his own hands enfolded his intended in her travelling-cloak and furs, while Mistress Legget tied on her black crape hood, and put up her dressing-case.

Althea would still have lingered, but Colonel Briggs seized her cold hand, led her downstairs, and placed her in the coach. He then seated himself by her side. Bethuliel mounted beside the coachman on the box, and gave the word to start.

The coach passed under the portcullis arch and crossed the drawbridge. Althea leaned from the window with swimming eyes, and tried to turn a last look towards the clustered islets on the lake, but the screen of leafless trees which intervened barred the prospect from her view. All she could do was to send a farewell sigh to Philipson. She then muffled her face in the folds of her black

crape veil, and wept in silence, without bestowing the slightest attention on her uncongenial companion.

Briggs during the whole of the journey preserved a gloomy taciturnity.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE road pursued by Colonel Briggs ran through the beautiful valley of Troutbeck, and Applethwaite Common, skirting High Street, the old Roman road whence Althea obtained a distant view of Ulswater, Hill Bell, and Frostwick.

This wild and wondrous district was wholly new to her. Rydal and Grassmere she had visited on bright summer days with Mrs. Kezia Briggs, who had also shown her some of the lovely scenery round Ambleside and Bowness, but further had not ventured to take her, lest a desperate attempt at abduction should be made by Philipson.

The snow now lay thick on the mighty summit of Kirkstone Pass and all the lofty mountain range, through which they travelled. The heavy rain had, indeed, partially dissolved the snow-wreaths on some of the lower fells ; but having frozen again, they assumed the appearance of glaciers or rocks of glittering spar in the wintry sunshine.

How different would have been Althea's feelings, as she gazed on the sublime scenery through which she passed, had she not been seated by the side of Colonel Briggs, and thought of the abhorrent sacrifice to which she was doomed.

The track lay occasionally across wild moors and boggy swamps. At Swarth Fell the red deer started from their solitary haunts and fled before the invading cavalcade ; the road was rough, broken and craggy, and it was with no slight difficulty the horses succeeded in dragging the heavy coach up and down the precipitous heights ; but at last, thoroughly

worn and jaded, they gained the inn at Pooley Bridge.

Before they arrived at Pooley Bridge, Colonel Briggs's *avant courier*, or running footman, who had started previously to the coach and its escort, and far out-travelled the jaded cattle, had engaged the posting-house inn for his master's use, and ordered a hot substantial supper, of the best provisions the village afforded, to be ready against the arrival of the colonel and the lady, which he accurately calculated would be about five o'clock.

Althea had taken no food since breakfast ; and notwithstanding her distress of mind, the sharp clear mountain air had produced its usual stimulating effect both on her spirits and her frame ; so that not only to Colonel Brigg's astonishment, but her own, she ate heartily of the venison soup, baked trout and roast moor-fowl, followed by cranberry tart and cream, and drank a cup of sparkling birch wine, an excellent substitute for champagne.

Colonel Briggs, who was now in a marvellous good-humour, condescended to tell her “That she looked all the better for her journey, which had cured her headache;” adding, “That she had acted like a sensible young woman in making a good supper, instead of indulging in a perverse fit of weeping and going fasting to bed;” offered to read a parliamentary diurnal to her, which had just arrived from London, with a choice speech of his friend Colonel Cromwell in it; and when she excused herself from the infliction, under the plea of fatigue, and expressed her wish of retiring to her own apartment, he, with unwonted gallantry, lighted the lamp and presented it to her, took her hand at parting, and would even have pressed it to his lips, but she snatched it impulsively away, curtsied coldly, and retreated from the room; for his lover-like deportment was far more intolerable to her than his incivility.

The landlady, a primitive Cumberland

matron, presented herself at the foot of the stairs, and showed Althea into the bed-chamber that had been prepared for her. It was clean but old-fashioned, panelled with black oak, with two deep curtained recesses opposite the bed, one was for a washing and dressing-room, the other was fitted up with shelves and pegs for a temporary wardrobe. The bed itself stood within a boarded screen, which had the appearance of a rude alcove. Two easy-chairs, formed of braided sedges, wadded, and covered with hare-skins, occupied the chimney corners, a large pile of peat was burning on the wide hearth, and diffused a red glowing heat through the room. The floor was fresh strewn with clean rushes, a fashion which still lingered in the north. The only piece of luxury the room contained was a small circular-looking glass, crowned with peacock's feathers, and surrounded with a wreath of holly-leaves and red berries.

The landlady called Althea's attention to

the cleanliness of her home-spun and home-woven sheets and blankets, and the fanciful stitching of the warm woollen quilt, of which she was justly proud; assured her everything was well aired, offered to make an egg posset with mead or cowslip wine to send her to sleep; and finally warranted her room “free from boggarts;” some species of goblins peculiar to Lancashire and Cumberland; and as Althea declined her assistance in disrobing, curtsied reverentially and withdrew.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE is no luxury to the wretched like solitude. Althea rose, barred her door, explored the curtained recesses, visited every corner of the room to assure herself she was alone, trimmed her lamp and looked at her watch. It was scarcely nine o'clock, yet the house was getting profoundly quiet, for every one retired to bed at a primitively early hour in that country.

She took Mrs. Kezia Briggs's little gold-clasped Bible, which, ever since the death of that beloved and lamented relative, had been her inseparable companion, from her dressing-case, and settled herself to read. Almost

every page bore witness that it had been deeply studied by the deceased, being marked with references and comments in her own familiar hand, which seemed to render many passages that Althea had hitherto deemed obscure clear and satisfactory to her mind.

Althea became gradually calmer as she read ; it seemed as if her lost friend were present and directing her attention to sweet and consoling passages. She had read them before indeed, but had never laid their healing unction to her sick heart, till thus silently pointed out to her observation—pointed out as if from the grave.

She read and prayed in the silence of that lonely room till the eleventh hour had struck ; her eyes grew heavy, and she retired to bed. Scarcely had her wearied head touched the pillow, when she heard the heavy step of Colonel Briggs, in his creaking military boots, ascend the stairs. He paused at her door ;

her heart beat fast and thick, her pulse intermitted, and there was a convulsive swelling in her throat which impeded her breath ; but he had only stopped to listen, and presently passed on to a chamber at the end of the gallery.

Althea ejaculated a fervent thanksgiving when she heard his door shut, breathed a prayer for deliverance from the evil destiny with which she was threatened, and endeavoured to compose herself to sleep, but her brain was in too excited a state for slumber. She had extinguished the lamp, but the red light of the peat fire on the hearth rendered everything in the chamber visible. Sometimes she fancied she heard whispering voices near her, and sometimes low sharp knocks in succession sounded on the oaken panels of the chamber. Finally, she saw a female figure, swathed in flowing white drapery, glide from one of the curtained recesses opposite, and advance to the foot of the bed. The

mysterious visitant repressed with authoritative gesture the wild cry of terror, that rose to the lips of the startled maiden.

“Hush!” she whispered; “you will rouse the bridegroom, yonder, from the bonny dream I have sent him off struggling in the wild rushing waters of Morecambe Bay and the pale form of his drowning bride clinging about his neck with her damp cold hands, and sinking him down to the central abyss with her dead leaden weight.”

“Merab,” exclaimed Althea, breaking with a strong effort, the spell of silence that had been thrown over her, “how came you here?”

“If the scowl-browed roundhead who called me ‘the witch of the lake,’ had propounded that question, I would have replied, I rode the night-mare over Wansfell and Hillbell,” said Merab, “but I will not affray thee, poor maiden, with needless terrors, for thou hast evil enough without.”

“Tell me only how to escape the performance of my fatal promise to become his wife, for I fear he has got a clergyman at Carlisle, who has consented to join our hands according to the form enjoined by my own church?”

“Much may and will occur ere the midnight hour comes round again,” said Merab. “Drive off the time as long as you can; and sleep a few hours in peace to-night, that your spirits fail not when the trial comes.”

She waved her hand once or twice over Althea’s fevered brow, and slumber so deep and profound descended on her tear-swollen eyelids, that she awoke not till it was broad daylight, and then persuaded herself that her nocturnal vision had been the coinage of an impressive dream.

But, acting on the warning of driving off time as much as possible, she took her breakfast in her bedroom, and lingered provokingly over it, in spite of the reiterated summonses

she received from Colonel Briggs, who was all impatience to start for Carlisle. It was not till he came himself, and thundered at her chamber-door, that she opened it and came forth.

“Are you aware that it is past ten of the clock?” growled he.

“I fancied it had been somewhat later,” replied Althea, with an air of provoking indifference, “or I had been a little longer, for I was a-weary last night, but you have made noise enough to rouse the seven sleepers, and given me a bad headache, withal.”

“A complaint to which you appear vastly subject, madam,” observed he, with a sarcastic smile.

“I am the more to be pitied, with so unsympathizing a companion,” retorted Althea.

“I trust ere long to cure you of all your fine-lady maladies,” said Briggs.

“Yes, by bringing me to an early grave,” replied Althea, with a quivering lip, “and, oh that I were there now.”

“Will you be pleased to let me put you into the coach, without more ado?” said he, “it has been at the door waiting for you for nearly an hour, and the roads are so bad, it will be worse travelling than it was yesterday; we shall infallibly be late.”

“So much the better,” muttered Althea to herself, then turning her eyes with a scrutinizing glance upon him, as he seated himself by her side, she said, “you have been pleased to scoff at my headache, Colonel Briggs, but, to judge from your appearance, you are not well yourself to-day. In sooth, you look as drearily as if, like Clarence, you had had a miserable night.”

“Marry, and so I have,” replied he, gloomily, “for if ever a man was hag-ridden in his sleep, I was last night.”

“Hag-ridden?” repeated Althea, as Merab’s

description of his dream recurred to her mind, and affecting mirthfulness she was far from feeling, she said, "oh, then I suppose you had a vision of Kerenhappuch, whom you so remorselessly expelled from Calgarth yesterday?"

"Nay," replied he, his swarthy cheek fading to a deadlier shade of pallor, as he spoke. "I verily believe that an evil spirit in thy form, Althea Woodville, hung like an incubus about my neck, last night, and strove to strangle me."

"An awful warning of the misery that cannot but be involved in a marriage with me," rejoined Althea. "Do not slight it, my good cousin, if you regard your own peace, for I am sure to make you a most wretched man."

"We shall settle passing well in the yoke together, after the first struggle for the mastery is over," rejoined Briggs.

"Nothing but hatred, despair, and crime,

can result from such abhorrent nuptials," said Althea, turning away with a shudder.

"You will not change my purpose," returned he, with sullen firmness, and both became silent.

CHAPTER XV.

IN consequence of the heavy state of the roads, they did not enter Carlisle till after sunset. The town was full to overflowing ; but, in consequence of the exertions of Corporal MacCaul, accommodation had been secured for Colonel Briggs and his party at a large inn in the High Street, kept by a zealous Independent named Shimei Sharp, and distinguished by the sign of Elisha's Raven. This scriptural bird had recently superseded the old-established national sign of St. George and the Dragon, which aforetime blazed in red, green, and gold, over the portal of Frank Filby, a merry little publican, erroneously

described in the writ of ejection, whereby he was expelled from his hostelry, as “a very unbeloved malignant,” for never was any one more popular than Frank Filby, who had nearly ruined himself by the long scores he imprudently consented to chalk up for his customers, especially those of the loyal side, while his successor, Shimei Sharp, besides looking carefully to the main chance, and giving no credit to persons suspected of poverty, carried his republican principles to such a pitch as to maintain that his namesake of yore was not only a patriot but a martyr.

Shimei and his wife, Peninnah Sharp, when the coach drew up to the door, advanced to inquire the pleasure of Colonel Briggs and his fair fellow-traveller, with the air of persons who thought they were conferring an important favour in admitting them.

“A good hot supper as soon as it can be served,” said Colonel Briggs, “a private sitting-room, and——”

“How many bedchambers do your honours lack?” asked Peninnah.

“One will suffice,” replied Colonel Briggs.

“Oh, no—no—no!” cried Althea, catching Peninnah’s arm, “I must have a separate bedroom, my dear, good woman!”

“Are ye wed?” asked Peninnah?

“No,” cried Althea, clinging to her.

“We are to be married at eight o’clock this evening,” said Colonel Briggs. “Show this lady into a dressing-room, and assist her to disencumber herself of her travelling-cloak, riding-hood, and veil, while I speak to Corporal MacCaul, who is waiting for me, I observe.”

Althea followed Peninnah up-stairs, and Colonel Briggs meantime took the corporal into a private room, and inquired whether he had been able to procure a clergyman of the Church of England to perform the service required?

“May it please your honour,” said MacCaul,

“it is an unco difficult thing to compass. Thae English ministers are aw’ off to the hills, but there is one, Dr. Lackin, who is under sentence of death for sending letters frae King Charles about the country, and he makes sic a heavy moan about his wife and sax bairns, that if your honour will impower me to promise in your name that you will ask his life of Sir David Lesley, and gie him a handful o’ broad pieces, I think he will undertake the job, though he has sma’ stomach til it.”

Briggs told the corporal to promise in his name everything that could be demanded by Dr. Lackin, and to have all in readiness for the marriage at eight o’clock in the cathedral, engaging also to reward him handsomely for his trouble in bringing the matter to pass.

CHAPTER XVI.

CARLISLE Cathedral was dimly lighted by a few scattered lamps brought thither hastily, and placed as chance directed, serving rather to make the darkness and desolation of the holy fane visible, than to disperse it. The choir and chancel presented the usual scene of desecration and disorder occasioned by the bivouac of roundhead soldiers in a place of worship, to which their leaders were antagonistic. Pulpit, font, and screen, lay prostrate in the dust, *sedillæ* and stalls were hurled from their places, and mixed with the broken effigies from the tombs of bishops, abbots, peers, and knights, while the wintry

blast whistled, and the rain pattered through the fractured panes of stained glass.

As the clock struck eight, the doors of the great western entrance were thrown open. The darkness of the nave was partially dispelled by torches borne by eight troopers, who preceded and guarded the bride and bridegroom, with naked broadswords in their right hands, holding the lighted torches in their left. The rear of the procession was brought up by a like number of armed military illuminators.

The slowness and solemnity of their march, the dejection and marble paleness of the bride, the deep mourning in which she was arrayed, the ample folds of her long, black travelling-cloak, sweeping the pavement, as she walked by the side of the grim bridegroom, on whose arm she leaned, not in tender reliance, but absolutely for bodily support, as he impelled her reluctant steps towards the chancel, gave the spectators, who had crowded thither to

witness these extraordinary nuptials, the idea of a funeral rather than a bridal.

The women observed with surprise that there were no bridesmaids or ladies of any kind, no, not so much as a female servant present, to support and assist the almost fainting bride.

Althea was too painfully absorbed in her own wretchedness to be aware that she was an object of eager curiosity to the mob of military puritans who thronged the choir and chancel, wearing their steeple-crowned hats or steel caps, intermingled with not a few of their blue-bonneted northern visitors and allies.

Presently a glare of light gleamed through the south transept, and a platoon of soldiers bearing lighted torches, advanced towards the chancel, conducting Dr. Lackin, arrayed in surplice, hood, and bands, in the centre of their phalanx, his hands fettered and with a halter about his neck.

The poor doctor had been invested by Corporal MacCaul with the insignia of his desperate situation for the purpose of intimidation, in consequence of flatly refusing, at the last minute, to perform the service for which the corporal had caused him to be dragged out of his dungeon. The group of triumphant sectarians assembled in the choir and chancel, burst into a shout of uproarious merriment at this spectacle.

The pale bride started violently from the dull stupor of despair, in which she was awaiting the accomplishment of her sacrifice, and involuntarily responded with a wild hysterical laugh, ending in a scream so piercing that it was echoed back from roof to gallery, throughout that portion of the building.

All turned about to inquire whence that appalling sound proceeded, and few hearts were there so hard as not to feel a throb of pity agitating them at the whispered answer

that ran through the chancel, "Whist to't, t'was t' bride skirled up that wofu' cry."

A deeper shade of gloom darkened the bridegroom's livid brow, as he observed all eyes turned upbraidingly on him, and he bit his nether lip, and glared so furiously on the pale, shrinking victim, by his side, as to excite the unconcealed indignation of the female part of the spectators.

Corporal MacCaul meantime, who in his sanguine hopes of earning ten gold pieces, had answered for Dr. Lackin's compliance with Colonel Briggs's requisition, now began to experience some misgivings on the subject; but, calculating on the poor doctor's feeble temperament and earnest desire of life, determined to take a high hand, in order to intimidate him; leading him to the front of the steps, where the altar formerly stood, he addressed him in these words:

"Now, doctor, ye maun do your best to mak' these twa folk man and wife, and the

right honourable bridegroom, Colonel Briggs, o' Calgarth, will ensure yer pardon and release, with leave to gang home to yer puir wife and bairns. His honour will give ye good largess of broad-pieces, but an' ye boggle at the job, or mak' skippages o' the hard words, or la'fu' forms of bondage, in yer filthy mass-buik, I shall only have to give the word to the godly men-at-arms, an' they'll haul ye forth by your hempen necklace, and hang ye up on the tallest tree in the Close, to scare the crows. So set about yer work without more loss o' time, and don't stand staring the puir bride out of countenance wi' aw yer teeth chattering, as if ye had a fit of the ague."

"I—I object!" said Dr. Lackin, in a faltering voice, "to perform the office of holy matrimony under the present circumstances."

"Hout, tout! master parson, have you no care for yer craig?" shouted MacCaul, giving, at the same time, a significant twitch

to the halter, which had the effect of throwing the poor doctor, who was a fat, asthmatic subject, into such a convulsion of coughing, as threatened to forestall the intervention of a hangman, by choking him on the spot.

“What are your reasons for objecting to unite this lady and me in wedlock?” demanded Colonel Briggs, in a tone so menacing that the poor doctor, as soon as he could recover his breath sufficiently to make an effort to speak, instead of pleading, as he had intended, scruples of conscience, ejaculated in a pitiful tone, “Ugh—ugh—ugh, I have no clerk!”

This naïve declaration was received with shouts of laughter from the sectarian bystanders.

Corporal MacCaul, who was a practical joker, a mimic, and a droll, clapped the doctor jocosely on the shoulder, exclaiming at the same time, “Cheer up, mon, I will be yer clerk.”

“You are not qualified to undertake an ecclesiastical office,” said the doctor.

“That is a sair mistake, yer reverence,” said MacCaul. “I have acted before now as precentor to a godly congregation. I can read your awn buik and chop Latin, thanks to King Jamie’s parish schules, wi’ the best o’ ye. Haud a wee bit, an’ I’ll jist stond behind ye wi’ a torch, so that I may glint at yer buik o’er yer shouther to cry Amen in the right place, though it goes agin my conscience to assist in a prelatical mass; but I were laith the bride and bridegroom should be disappointed.”

CHAPTER XVII.

“BEGIN, sir,” cried Briggs to Dr. Lackin, with an authoritative gesture.

“Amen,” responded the self-constituted clerk, in a voice as loud as the report of a pistol.

“My conscience will not permit me to solemnize the service of matrimony in this irregular and constrained manner, without previous publication of banns, unless assured of the lady’s consent, whom I suspect to be a prisoner and a reluctant party,” said the doctor, as the torch in MacCaul’s hand flashed on the death-like features of Althea. “Speak, madam ; is it your wish that I should join

you in the holy and indissoluble bonds of marriage to the man who hath brought you hither?"

"Ay, ay; be sure you don't wed them till you have heard that frae her own lips, poor birdie," responded the female portion of the throng, whose kindly sympathies were powerfully excited in behalf of the woeful bride.

"Is it your wish," repeated Dr. Lackin, in a more audible tone than he had previously ventured to use, "to be joined in holy matrimony with this man?"

"My wish?" exclaimed Althea; "oh, no, no!"

"Is it thus you perform your promise, faithless woman?" asked Briggs, sternly.

"I never promised to conceal the horror with which I contemplate the idea of our marriage, and I herewith declare that it is far more dreadful to me than death," replied Althea.

The bridegroom's brow became dark as midnight at this public avowal.

"You then refuse to become his wife?" demanded Dr. Lackin of Althea.

"I must not," replied Althea, dejectedly, "for, alas! I have no other choice."

"Surely, sir," said Dr. Lackin, turning to Colonel Briggs, "you cannot wish to marry this poor lady without her consent?"

"She does consent," replied Briggs.

The doctor shook his head, and the women murmured loudly against the barbarity of compelling one young and fair as the bride to wed an ill-favoured and crabbed carle, more than double her age, against her will.

"Althea Woodville," said Briggs, "have you not solemnly consented to become my wife?"

Althea bowed her head in silence.

"That is not enough," cried he; "you must bear witness of the fact in words."

"What am I to say?" asked Althea.

“Provoking affectation of innocence,” muttered he, in a wrathful aside. “Testify that you are willing to perform your promise to become my wife.”

“That would be deliberate falsehood,” interposed she, earnestly, “for I am not willing.”

“Well, then, ready.”

Althea strove to speak, but the words appeared to choke her, and died away on her pale, quivering lip.

“I am a-weary of this trifling,” exclaimed Briggs, impatiently. “Priest, proceed to your office without further delay.”

The doctor cast a compassionate look on Althea, and hesitated. Corporal MacCaul gave the halter about his neck a knowing twitch, which decided him to waive his conscientious scruples, and go through with the service. After a second fit of spasmodic coughing, he began in a quavering voice, ‘Dearly beloved——’

Here Corporal MacCaul confused him by whispering in his ear :

“That must be the bride, as she is a cavalier’s daughter, for sma’ is the love ye bear to ony of us, I am thinking. Gang on wi’ ye.”

Here the doctor dropped his book on the ground and lost his place. The bridegroom signified his displeasure by stamping his iron-guarded heel on the pavement.

“It is not my fault,” said the doctor ; my hands are cramped with the weight of this chain, and I cannot hold the book, nor, in sooth, perform mine office.”

“Strike off his fetters,” cried Briggs to MacCaul.

The self-elected clerk, who infinitely enjoyed the scene, obeyed with a sly grin, and the doctor, after pitifully rubbing his wrists, began with a more assured manner and steadier voice to read the commencing exhortation in the marriage service :

“ Dearly beloved brethren, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and in the face of this congregation to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony.”

Here the bride started, and a half-smothered cry escaped her lips, which was attributed by all present to her abhorrence of the plight into which she was now entering with a bridegroom so unequivocally the object of her aversion. But a sound had fallen on Althea's ear, without the cathedral, which had diverted her attention from everything within, rendering her unconscious even of the fact that the fatal rite which was to make her the wife of Colonel Briggs had actually commenced. The sound which had abstracted her faculties so strangely from all others was that of the approach of a single horseman at almost supernatural speed. She had heard such riding once before, once and once only, and that was when she was rescued by Philipson from the advancing tides on the Cartmel

sands. She could not be mistaken; there was but one such rider. The bounds of his fiery steed drew nearer and more near. Althea listened with suppressed breath. She heard nought else till the momentous question was addressed to the bridegroom by the priest: "Bartholomew, wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife?" etc.

The emphatic response, "I will," pronounced by Colonel Briggs in a hoarse, deep voice, recalled Althea to recollection. She started violently, and impulsively raised her clasped hands in mute but agonizing supplication as she encountered the dark, penetrating eye of Merab, whose eagle-like profile, though partially shaded by the hood of the large black cloak which enveloped her from head to foot, was too remarkable to be disguised. Merab was standing on an altar-shaped tomb in the chancel, above the crowd and distinct from all, in statue-like immobility of face and form, watching intently the progress of the bridal.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ALTHEA,” said the priest, addressing the pale, sinking bride, “wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together in the holy state of matrimony, according to God’s ordinance? Wilt thou obey him?——”

“Never!” exclaimed Althea.

“My good lady,” said Dr. Lackin, “you must at least promise to obey, or the service cannot proceed.”

“I am a woman with a conscience,” rejoined Althea, “and will not deliberately perjure myself at the altar of God.”

“You perversely insisted on the ceremonials of your own corrupt church, and

that enjoins you to obey," observed Colonel Briggs."

"I neither can nor will," said Althea.

"My fair mistress," interposed the self-constituted clerk, "it is aw in the buik, and very cannily set forth for the guid man's benefit, and if ever I marry, it shall be after this fashion."

"Proceed without further loss of time," cried Briggs to the doctor, "and pay no heed to her vain interruptions."

"Wilt thou serve him?" continued the doctor, turning to Althea.

"She shook her head in negation.

"Wilt thou honour him and love him?"

"Impossible!" cried Althea.

The doctor flung the book from his hand.

"Hallo," cried MacCaul, "what is the meaning of this?"

Soldiers, torchbearers, and spectators turned simultaneously about, for the clatter of horses' heels rang on the pavement of the nave, and

a cavalier, riding at headlong speed, but unaccompanied, dashed through the choir, entered the crowded chancel, and drawing a pistol from his belt deliberately pointed it at the bridegroom's head. It flashed in the pan, and Briggs, to his own astonishment, stood unscathed.

"It is Robin the Devil!" exclaimed Briggs's panic-stricken Westmoreland troopers.

"Surround and drag him from his horse," shouted Briggs; "his petronel has missed fire."

"That petronel has a fellow," cried Philipson.

But ere he could draw it forth, Corporal MacCaul thrust his lighted torch full in the face of the mettled Arabian on which Philipson was mounted. The proud steed reared back with tossing mane and bloodshot eyes, then plunging forwards, his fore-feet slipped on the polished black marble slab which covered the remains of the last dean of

Carlisle. The tightly-braced saddle-girths burst in the struggle the noble animal made to obey the curb of his intrepid master, and Philipson was precipitated to the ground with a violent shock.*

The piercing scream of the half-wedded bride of his foe was echoed by most of the women in the chancel, for the fate of the adventurous cavalier appeared inevitably decided by this unlucky accident. The hitherto motionless figure on the tomb now raised her arm, and the lamps were suddenly extinguished.

The troopers, as if by general consent, dropped their torches, and the lofty cathedral was enveloped in gloom. Dr. Lackin availed

* It was the historical fact of Robert Philipson riding singly into the church to attack his enemy, Colonel Briggs, at the altar, that suggested to Sir Walter Scott the masterly scene in "Rokeby," where Bertram Risinghame performs a similar exploit, and is slain; but the gallant young cavalier, Philipson (with whom I am ancestrally connected), was so fortunate as to escape unharmed, and after performing many brilliant services for his king and party, was slain at the battle of Washford, in Ireland.

himself of the general confusion to extricate his neck from the halter, and casting off surplice, hood, and band at one pluck, leaped from the steps of the chancel among the crowd, kicking over in his flight the only luminary that remained, a huge brass lantern, that stood near the entrance of the transept, and successfully escaped.

An unexpected diversion in Philipson's favour was now created by another horseman dashing up the aisle, who scattered the panic-stricken crowd to right and left.

Philipson snatched his saddle from the ground, and flinging it on the back of his good steed, which had risen, and was, fortunately, uninjured by the fall, planted his hand firmly on the neck of the gallant animal, and promptly regained his seat by a feat of agility that could scarcely have been surpassed in these days by the ablest horseman in Franconi's equestrian troop.

All this was but the work of a moment; in

less than another he was safely out of the cathedral, followed by his equally fearless and fortunate squire, Wat Sorby, amidst volleys of pistol-shot and the yells of their baffled foes, leaving Colonel Briggs, to whom Sorby had dealt a stunning blow with the flat of his broadsword, prostrate on the pavement of the chancel.

CHAPTER XIX.

ALTHEA had felt strong presentiments that her much-dreaded nuptials with Colonel Briggs would be interrupted by some rash enterprise of Philipson, but had not been prepared for the reckless manner in which he had imperilled his life, as it appeared, for nought.

Philipson having been absent from the Long Holme Island, had not received intelligence of Briggs's journey to Carlisle with Althea, and its object, till too late to carry into effect his first design, of intercepting him on the road with a strong party, and taking Althea from him at sword's point. Still he followed hard and hot upon his track till he met an

express messenger five miles out of Carlisle, at half-past seven in the evening, who was despatched by Merab to apprise him that the marriage was appointed to take place at eight; therefore there was little chance of his arriving in time to prevent it.

Philipson, however, reflected that a reluctant bride is not always punctual to the time named by the bridegroom, and resolved, in the impulsive desperation of the moment, to dash on to Carlisle, shoot his rival at the altar, and carry off the bride, trusting to his usual good fortune for success, and the support of persons of his own politics in Carlisle.

But for the manner in which Althea had driven off the time, the reluctance of Dr. Lackin to perform the service, and the delays caused by his questions to Althea; likewise her protestations against the conjugal engagement to obey Colonel Briggs, the irrevocable vows would have been plighted. Philipson had outridden all his followers, though

“galloping Harry Curwen,” of Workington Hall, was one, and even the faithful, energetic Wat Sorby was left in the rear. But unconscious, in the fierce excitement of the moment, that he was unsupported, he had darted into the cathedral with the celerity of a winged meteor, and but for the unexpected accident that had befallen his horse, he might have carried his daring project into execution. As it was, he had won the hot race he had ridden against time, yet the fair prize for which he had undertaken the desperate adventure remained in the power of her half-wedded bridegroom.

The late tumultuous, agitating scene had floated before Althea’s bewildered sight like the wild pageantry of feverish dreaming. She was conscious of none of its realities, save that Philipson had appeared before her, and was gone, how and where, she knew not, but apparently he was safe; then she glanced fearfully on the fourth finger of her left hand,

but it was unencircled with the golden fetter. She was still free, still Althea Woodville.

The prediction of Merab had been strangely, yea, literally fulfilled. Althea had stood at the marriage altar, prepared to link her reluctant hand with that of Colonel Briggs; but she was not yet his wife; perhaps she never might be.

His gaunt form lay extended at her feet, stunned from the effect of the parting favour Wat Sorby had dealt him; but Althea was unconscious of the circumstance till the gloom that pervaded the cathedral was dispelled by the re-lighting of the extinguished torches, and Bethuliel and Samuel Stunner came to look for their master, when it was ascertained that, although insensible, he had received no serious injury. A barber-surgeon, who had hastened to the scene of action, opened a vein in his arm. The blood flowed readily, and on opening his eyes he sat up, and, looking fiercely round him, inquired for the bride.

“The bonnie lassie in the dule cloak and veil, puir lammie! is at yer side, colonel,” replied Corporal MacCaul, who was holding the torch, “but no bride of yers as yet, nor ken I how she is to become so at present.”

“As I live and breathe, she shall not leave the church till she is my wife,” said Briggs.

“Yer honour maun be at the pains of catching another parson, then, for he who begun to wed you to the cavalier lady here is clean gone, feather and bone,” observed MacCaul.

“Scoundrel!” cried Briggs, “how durst you suffer him to escape?”

“Hout tout, colonel, it is aw to my loss, I fear; unless ye wad be pleased to consider that I took as muckle fash to get yer honour ’spoused to yon fair lady as if ye now were ane flesh. God forgie my wickedness! for the sake o’ the broad pieces, that tempted me; but I hope your honour won’t be worse

nor your word about the broad pieces, seeing I ha' done my best wi' unco zeal in the matter of hunting up a parson for ye, and half throttling him to quash his scruples."

"How came you to let the rascal escape, then?"

"May it please your honour, it was aw through my zeal in saving your life, when Robin the De'il was going to pistol you, by flashing my torch in his horse's eyes, which caused the bonnie beast to throw his master; then out went all the lights, away scampers the parson, and while we were chasing him, Robin the De'il flew off like Will o' the Wisp. I swear I saw the fire spring up from his horse's heels, and I verily believe they both flew through the cathedral roof. So I hope, yer honour, considering all my services, will gi' me the broad pieces you promised me."

"I'll give you forty stripes, not lacking one," cried Briggs, angrily.

“Thank ye for yer generous intentions, colonel, but you are no my commander; so ye maun save your stripes for those qhua ha’ cause to fear ye, puir de’ils!” replied Corporal MacCaul, with a low bow.

Colonel Briggs now summoned his troopers to attend him, and led Althea back to the inn, where he was subjected to the impertinent condolences of Shimei and his wife Peninnah, on his continuance in a state of celibacy, and that separate chambers would be requisite for him and the lady.

Mistress Peninnah informed them, “they could have the bedrooms that night, as a great favour; but that all the accommodations in Elisha’s Raven were taken up by the Scotch officers for the next, save one sitting-room, where he and the lady must breakfast and dine together, and begged they would clear out as soon as possible, their room being, just then, of more value than their company.

Althea could not refrain from smiling at

this specimen of republican manners, though it crossed her determination of secluding herself in her own chamber during her stay at Carlisle.

Colonel Briggs's remonstrances at the disrespect were treated with utter disregard, and he had the mortification of finding himself a person of no consequence away from his own immediate neighbourhood, where he was both hated and feared.

CHAPTER XX.

THE morrow was a day of down-pouring rain, and Colonel Briggs found himself too much indisposed, in consequence of the contusion on his head, to take any further steps respecting his marriage. He was, withal, recommended by the surgeon who came to attend him, to keep himself very quiet. This injunction he obeyed as well as it was possible for a man of his irascible temper to do, by quarrelling with those about him not oftener than thrice an hour, as he reclined in a large uneasy wooden chair, with his head bound up, and supported on a pillow. He was not sorry, however, to keep Althea in his own

sight, so greatly did he dread her escape or abduction by Philipson.

Althea, though, for the present, respited from the horror of being irrevocably linked with Colonel Briggs, was ineffably wretched at finding herself compelled to pass the day in a gloomy *tête-à-tête* with him, unprovided with work, books, or any other means of amusement. The windows of the room, high, narrow casements, only looked into the inn yard, and the rain was incessant.

At length the dulness was interrupted, not dispersed, by sundry visits which were made to Colonel Briggs by the officers of the parliamentary regiment at Carlisle, who were attracted principally by curiosity to see the fair and wealthy heiress of Sir Lionel Woodville, whose reluctance to enter into matrimonial engagements with their companion in arms had caused great amusement and speculation both among the English and Scotch at Carlisle.

The unceremonious manner in which these men strode, unannounced, into the room, with their steeple-crowned hats on their heads, and, after seating themselves uninvited, or spreading themselves on the hearth, so as to intercept all the warmth of the burning peat and logs, astonished Althea, and annoyed Colonel Briggs, who tolerated no ill-breeding but his own, and was peculiarly offended at the rude manner in which they stared at his affianced, and passed their comments in loud whispers on her personal appearance.

Some of them observed that her charms had been greatly exaggerated by report, while others, in still louder rejoinders, protested that she was quite handsome enough to excuse the desperate enterprise of Robin the Devil on the preceding evening, even if she were not one of the wealthiest heiresses in England, and that Colonel Briggs would be the most fortunate of men if he could secure such a prize.

It would be difficult to say whether the remarks were more displeasing to Althea or Colonel Briggs. The latter vainly endeavoured to excuse himself from the intrusion of these persons, who were neither beardless ensigns nor raw lieutenants, but men who ranked as his equals in the service of the parliament, and considered themselves entitled to act perfectly independently of the rules of good breeding.

They had won for themselves the liberty which supersedes politeness, and made a point of saying, without reserve, whatsoever they listed. They paid no heed either to the distress and disgust of Althea, or the significant hints waspishly uttered by Briggs on "the unpleasantness to invalids, and persons desirous of quiet and seclusion, of being harassed with intrusive visitors."

As for the officers of Sir David Lesley's staff, who paid him the compliment of inquiring after his health, he could scarcely, though

allied with them in the cause of the covenant, restrain the hereditary hostility of the borderer against Scots. Wearied out at length, he issued positive orders to Shimei Sharp to deny him to all comers whatsoever.

Shimei assured him "that it would be at the risk of his neck to offer the slightest incivility to the Scotch officers, who would not hesitate to hang him up on his own sign-post, by the side of Elisha's Raven."

Althea now broke the silence she had maintained all the morning, by recommending her guardian to secure himself and her from further intrusion by locking the door.

Colonel Briggs approved the suggestion, and was hastening to carry it into execution, when he was circumvented by Shimei Sharp, who, briskly stepping between him and the door, transferred the key from the lock to his breast pocket, saying, as he did so :

" Verily, I cannot away with secret doings,

nor suffer chambering nor belocked doors under the shadow of Elisha's Raven's wings."

"What do you mean, you insolent knave?" cried Briggs, in great wrath.

"I have a name as well as other folk, thof I beant a colonel," retorted Shimei, protruding his long chin with a defiant gesture; "and I isn't going to be accused of hiding malignants, as would be the case if I suffered you and the cavalier lady to lock any of the doors in my house against the officers of the garrison, specially of the true-blue Scotch covenanting army, who be, all of them, spragge customers of mine."

"Fellow!" said Colonel Briggs, "I will forthwith withdraw myself and company to the Noah's Ark, over the way."

"The sooner the better," returned Shimei. "Colonel MacDougal and his son, the major, have bespoken these quarters, and they will drink the cup dry oftener than Goring's cava-

liers. As for the Noah's Ark, you are welcome to go there if you can get in, but there are too many unclean beasts there already."

Bethuliel, who was despatched by Colonel Briggs to secure other quarters, found this report only too correct; not a bed was, in fact, to be obtained at any inn in Carlisle.

Colonel Briggs at last debated within himself whether it would not be better to leave Carlisle at once, notwithstanding the unfavourable state of the weather, than to stomach Shimei Sharp's insolence and assumption of equality, which, though an established principle of the republican party, was not a whit the more agreeable to persons whose ideas of liberty were purely selfish, founded on the determination of doing no right and bearing no wrong. Before he could make up his mind to go, a fresh party of visitors invaded his apartment, saluted him with coarse familiarity, stared Althea out of countenance, and

began to read the diurnals which had arrived that day with a clamorous confusion of tongues that was not only perplexing, but distracting to their reluctant auditors.

CHAPTER XXI.

PRESENTLY Shimei Sharp re-entered, and announced "The Reverend Jedediah Hollywood, a very precious vessel, who had been moved, in the course of his ministerial mission, to rest the sole of his foot under the shadow of Elisha's Raven's wings; and as Colonel Briggs occupied the most spacious upper chamber in the hostel, was minded to pour forth some of his spiritual treasures in his presence."

Never was a man less inclined to listen to an extempore sermon of unlimited length than Colonel Briggs just then, but he knew that his reputation for holiness and earnest-

ness in the cause would suffer if he declined to partake of the spiritual banquet the preacher volunteered to bestow, and he thought it more than probable, from the appearance of Master Jedediah Hollywood, that he would preach his unwelcome visitors out of the room.

Notwithstanding the peculiarly embarrassing situation in which Althea found herself, as the only female present, except Mistress Peninnah Sharpe, she felt inclined to smile when she looked upon the preacher. His complexion was of the most swarthy sallow, his long black hair was carefully plaistered to the shape of his head with a superabundance of oil, and covered his temples, forehead, and eyebrows. One lock of superior length was trimmed to a peak, and touched the point of his nose. Every line and muscle of his face bore the expression of having been twisted and forced into a solemnity somewhat at variance with the audacious sparkle of his

large eyes, which leered, rather than glanced, from beneath his black bushy hair; and there was an air of ill-concealed effrontery under the hypocritical air of spiritual meekness. His dress was slovenly, and his gait awkward, though he possessed the advantage of a powerful athletic frame. Like his friend, Shimei Sharp, he appeared to have small respect for place or persons. As soon as he had looked round him, he transferred his steeple-crowned hat from his fist, on which he had hitherto borne it, to his head, and, vaulting on the table with prodigious activity, he commenced his sermon from the following text: "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers."

There was something like a suppressed titter among the roundhead officers at the anticipated drift of Jedediah Hollywood's sermon, and significant glances were directed from Colonel Briggs to Althea by some of the subalterns as the preacher, warming with

his theme into undisguised personality, continued : “ Howl, howl, howl ! for the backslidings of the great ones in the service of the parliament, who have been ensnared by the outward beauty of the daughters of the malignants ; so I, Jedediah Hollywood, am an appointed vessel to tinkle in the ears of our men of war that they should not give themselves over unto idolatries through the witchcraft of the curled locks of the said Midianitish women, but especially unto Colonel Bartholomew Briggs, here present, to warn him that he should not set so evil an example to the godly as to take to wife the daughter of a bloody cavalier, and herself a notorious scoffer and opposer of the covenant, hight Mistress Althea Woodville ; doth not her very name savour of pagan idolatry and fabling of heathen poets ? Faugh ! is it meet that such a perverse daughter of Jezebel should be coupled in holy matrimony with, sometime pious Master Bartholomew Briggs ?

Hath he not already been a woeful backslider for love of her? and sought him out a prelatical priest to mumble over a mass from the book of Common Prayer at the joining of their hands, even as Solomon the son of David, was seduced into the sin of idolatry to pleasure his Egyptian wife? Doth not Carlisle ring with the report of his leading the Midianitish woman even into that abominable place of carved work, superstitious pictures, and canons' stalls, called the cathedral, with a popish procession of torches, minding shamelessly to be wedded according to all the antic forms prescribed in the dark ages of idolatry, and adopted by the heretical founders of the church—falsely called the Church of England—who were minded to sew a piece of old cloth into a new garment? This man, Bartholomew Briggs, caused, I say, one of their priests, called a doctor of divinity, lettered for short, D.D., and meaning by interpretation double dunce, to be brought

into the place called the chancel, where the old idolatrous altar had been set up once more by his order—his, a parliament man—for the celebration of his spousals with the daughter of a cavalier baronet. Shall such abominations be suffered in our Zion? Shall parliament and preachers have denounced and anathematized such vain superstitions, and yet a man holding high place in a covenanting army be permitted by his self-seeking will to set their authority at nought.”

“Silence, thou frantic knave!” interposed Briggs, angrily.

“I will not keep silence at thy bidding,” retorted the preacher; “but rather I will exalt my voice, like a trumpet, till the walls of Carlisle reply, and the army of prophets and preachers, who have come from the far north, to help the godly put down superstitious vanities, rise up and thrust thee forth of this city, lest lightning from heaven fall upon it and destroy it for thy sake.”

“Verily thou, precious young man,” exclaimed Shimei Sharp, “I have had sore tribulation of spirit, and many reproofs from the wife of my bosom, pious Mistress Peninnah Sharp, ever since the backsliding man, Bartholomew Briggs, entered our public, leading with him the Midianitish woman, yonder ; a very comely piece of perversity, with curled lovelocks, and a work of Satan’s, called a Vandyke ruff, about her neck ; and he craved for a parson to spouse them in the cathedral, instead of resorting to the lawful fashion of marrying by the publication of banns in the market-place, in the presence of a magistrate.”

Here the preacher rolled his eyes till only the whites were visible, and as if inspired with a sudden frenzy, leaped from the table and rushed into the street, where—springing upon an apple-woman’s stall—he clapped his hands vehemently, and shouted : “Gather yourselves together, oh ye soldiers

of the covenant ; soldiers, preachers, shopkeepers, and 'prentices, publicans and sinners, to a solemn assembly which I herewith proclaim."

CHAPTER XXII.

THERE is not an easier thing in the world than to collect a crowd, in a populous place ; and even if it had been a matter of difficulty the efforts of Jedediah Hollywood would have been crowned with success, so tempting was the chance of listening to a preacher of his appearance and original manner, and blessed withal with such stentorian power of lungs. The High Street of Carlisle was presently thronged with a motley company, to whom he repeated the substance of his previous rhapsody, adding so many inflammatory observations on the late attempt of Colonel Briggs to introduce the ceremonials

of the Church of England, a member of her clergy, and the use of an office of the interdicted book of Common Prayer into the cathedral, that a simultaneous movement of the fanatic mob to attack the Elisha's Raven was the effect of his fulminations, and in the course of a few minutes not a whole pane of glass was left in the front windows of the house, to the infinite consternation of Shimei Sharp, who had not for a moment calculated that any mischief to himself or his respected hostelry, could possibly have resulted from the exhortations of a preacher so much after his own heart.

The erratic energies of the preacher were, however, systematically pointed against Colonel Briggs, and his late attempt to introduce one of the offices of the interdicted liturgy.

“Shall not this man, Bartholomew Briggs,” continued he, “be driven forth from Carlisle, even as a leprous or unclean person is separated from the people ; so shall the city

escape vengeance, even as the crew preserved the ship by casting the perverse and rebellious prophet Jonah into the sea?"

Colonel Briggs, pale with dismay, listened to the hootings and yells of the excited mob which followed these denunciations, and turning to the Scotch officers he condescended to entreat them to quiet the tumultuous ebullition of popular fury, which had been, excited by the preacher in the street; but they had been too highly offended by his uncivil reception of their visits to be willing to render him the slightest assistance, in his unexpected distress.

Presently, Mistress Peninnah Sharp rushed into the room and besought him to depart, as the people without swore they would not leave one stone upon another of the house that harboured him.

Briggs felt little inclination to expose himself to the fury of the excited fanatics by quitting his present shelter. He uttered a

bitter execration as he glanced at Althea's dress, which, although it was deep mourning, was in the extreme of that fashion which might justly be styled the uniform of the ladies of the cavalier party. Her calmness and apparent indifference to the peril, in which they were both united, provoked him exceedingly; but it was not a moment for the indulgence of useless reproaches, for the rabble manifested a determination to force an entrance,

“Bethuliel,” cried Colonel Briggs, “summon the troopers and servants to defend the premises till Sir David Lesley sends the Scottish soldiers to reduce these lunatic villains to order.”

“Verily, colonel,” replied Bethuliel, scratching his head, “it is of no use for such a poor handful as we attempting to provoke slaughter by withstanding a multitude.”

Here a violent crash below, followed by a

tremendous acclamation, announced that the entrance door had been forced, and the mob were in possession of the house.

Briggs loaded his pistols, and ordered Bethuliel to bar the door of the apartment.

Althea grew pale as the uproar of voices and the trampling of feet approached nearer ; she turned her dark dilated eyes apprehensively on Colonel Briggs, and looked as though she could have clung even to his arm for protection.

Briggs stood in gloomy silence pointing his cocked pistol at the bending, creaking door, and offered no word of comfort or encouragement to her.

Another simultaneous shock from without, and the hinges of the door gave way, and several of the foremost assailants were precipitated into the room, face downwards, from the sudden breaking of the bar ; while a mass of furious faces appeared in the background.

“Stand back!” exclaimed Briggs, presenting his pistols; “or by the holy covenant the first man who sets a foot into this room, shall receive a brace of bullets in his brain.”

“Down with the prelatie traitor! Down with the cavalier witch; who hath ensnared a servant of the parliament into treason and idolatry!” cried many voices from among the excited crowd.

Althea's heart throbbed violently, but the desperation of her situation inspired her with unwonted courage; throwing back her veil—in which she had impulsively enveloped herself for protection from the rude gaze of the ruffian assailants—she now addressed them in a tone of expostulation:

“Is it according to the character of Englishmen to condemn an innocent person unheard? I am a young, helpless, unfriended woman, which should rather move you to pity me than to seek my poor life. Some among you

have daughters ; alas ! they are happier than I, for I am fatherless.” Her lip quivered ; her eyes filled with tears ; and sinking upon a seat, she covered her face with her clasped hands, and wept in silence, as if she thought her life scarcely worth the effort of pleading for.

Her appeal, simple as it was, produced an effect more powerful than the most brilliant burst of eloquence would have done, under the circumstances, on the hearts of those to whom it was addressed ; for the voice of nature is universally felt and understood. Althea, strong in her weakness, had not spoken in vain. The bloody purpose of the fanatic mob was suspended ; one alone among them observed, reproachfully : “ Ye might have sought out a spouse among your own people, lass, without ensnaring one of the commanders of the parliament to bring ye hither to be coupled according to the superstitious forms of a church whose candle hath been clean

put out by the zeal of the covenanting people.”

“Hold!” cried the preacher, who had now made his way into the room again, and stopped resolutely before Althea; “That was her misfortune rather than her fault. She is the victim—not the tempter—of yonder man of Belial, whose soul, verily, lusteth after her rich inheritance; she is his prisoner, and he hath misused his power.”

“Fellow-labourers in the good cause,” interposed Briggs, “this gentlewoman is my ward and near of kin; the daughter of mine aunt, a very godly woman; but her father was a malignant, and hath brought her up in his superstitious follies, so that at present she is somewhat of an untamed heifer, and, though under promise of marriage to me, cannot abide our godly plainness of worship, and craveth after surpliced and banded priests, printed books, altars, and such-like vain toys, from which bondage she shall be speedily loosed;

when she is my wife, bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh, then shall the curled locks, the gauds, the crisping-pins, the chains, the bracelets and the ruffs, in which the poor silly soul, at present, delighteth be cast to the bats and the moles ; wherefore, I pray ye, my brethren, deal not unkindly with me for her sake, nor yet with the damsel, seeing she is the daughter of my gracious aunt, a very holy woman, as all who knew her can testify.”

“ Bartholomew Briggs,” said the preacher, “ thou art not to be justified by thine aunt’s holiness, but judged by thine own backsliding. Hast thou not been seeking for a steeple-house priest, lo ! these six weeks past, to the end that he might wed thee to this fair daughter of the malignants, so as to give thee a legal hold on her and her inheritance, if so be kingcraft and priestcraft should he set up again.”

The people murmured loudly, and the preacher turning to them exclaimed : “ Shall

he be permitted to retain this damsel as an occasion of falling?"

"It were better that she died," answered several voices from the crowd.

Althea neither wept nor fainted, though she felt her peril, but she mutely turned a reproachful look on Colonel Briggs, as if to say, "This is thy work."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE preacher took Althea by the arm and turning her to the people, exclaimed : “ Look ye all at her, mark the fairness of her face, albeit it is now blanched with fear ; note the goodly proportions of her form, and judge whether a youthful maiden, thus peerlessly gifted by nature and richly endowed by fortune, would voluntarily bestow herself and her broad lands on yon gaunt ill-favoured man, whose years far more than double her own ? Speak out, damsel, for thyself, and I adjure thee to tell the truth. Is it thy wish to be wedded to this man ? ”

“ Oh, no ! no ! ” exclaimed Althea.

“Wilt thou be forsworn,” asked Briggs, sternly.

“Colonel Briggs, see you not how deeply you imperil both our lives by striving to unite destinies which are as antagonistic as fire and water?” returned Althea.

“Bartholomew Briggs, I exhort thee to release this woman from the promise she has unadvisedly made to become thy spouse,” said the preacher.

“Who made thee a judge between me and my betrothed?” returned Briggs, furiously.

“Howbeit, the Scotch troopers will be here anon: yea, I hear their pipes even now.”

“What avail shall the noise of their piping be to a dead ear?” asked the preacher of Briggs, with a glance which appeared to freeze the very marrow in his bones.

A fierce encounter now took place in the High Street and about the inn, between a company of Scotch troopers whom the military commander, Sir David Lesley, had

deemed it expedient to order out to quell the tumult.

But these being regarded as foreign invaders were greeted with the angry cry :

“No blue bonnets ! No plundering Scots ! We are Englishmen, and can settle our own quarrels without their help.”

In short, all the fiery border hostility which had animated Carlisle against her predatory neighbours, from the days of the Picts downwards, blazed out ; prelatists and puritans, catholics and infidels, loyal and disloyal, united for once against their old hereditary foes. The Scottish soldiers were not only repulsed from before the Elisha's Raven, but driven back to the castle in great disorder.

“Save yourself, Colonel Briggs !” exclaimed Althea, as the preacher, casting away his Geneva cloak, leaped upon Briggs with the spring of a tiger, and caught him by the throat.

Overpowered by the resistless fury of this unexpected assailant, the colonel measured his length upon the floor.

“Save yourself, Philistine, by renouncing the Midianitish damsel, and releasing her from her unlawful promise to become your spouse!” exclaimed the preacher.

The shrill notes of the Scotch pipes were again heard, and the street rang with the shouts of “A Lesley ! A Lesley !”

Colonel Briggs struggled to regain his feet, but the grasp of his powerful antagonist was still upon his throat.

“Do not murder him,” exclaimed Althea, trembling, as the face of her guardian became livid and convulsed.

“Yes,” replied the preacher, “I will strangle the false viper in another moment, unless he will swear never to injure the cause of the covenant by taking thee to wife.” Here he removed his fingers from Brigg’s throat, and planting his foot on his breast, exclaimed :

“Swear never to wed this woman, or you die !”

“Everything a man hath he will give for his life,” cried Briggs, as soon as he could recover his breath.

“No prevarication, Judas! but say after me: ‘I swear never to wed this woman, Althea Woodville, and I release her from her promise to become my wife!’” Briggs sullenly repeated the prescribed words.

“’Tis well!” exclaimed the preacher, releasing him, “you have done wisely,” then turning to Althea, pushed back the disguising mass of black hair from his face, and revealed to her for one moment—one only—the bright brow and flashing blue eyes of Philipson.

“Why did I not know him from the first?” she mentally inquired, “while those eyes remained unveiled?”

But the glimpse of his features had been detected by Briggs, who loudly exclaimed:

“Seize the feigned preacher ! He is a false malignant in disguise ! It is Robert Philipson himself.”

“Do I look like a false malignant, and least of all, like that deboshed cousin of your backsliding colonel ?” asked Philipson of Shimei Sharp, pulling down an especial long face as he spoke.

“I’ll be shot if you do,” replied Shimei, whose consequence was flattered by this appeal to his judgment. “He is much more like a false malignant himself.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE notes of the Scotch pipers in the High Street announced the arrival of a fresh reinforcement from Lesley. They were answered by the crowd with the angry cries of "No blue bonnets in merry Carlisle!"

Philipson darted into the *melée* with all the reckless valour that belonged to his character, shouting at the same time :—

"Sons of proud Cumberland rally in order
And drive the blue bonnets back over the border."

The next minute he was leading a heterogeneous mixture of roundheads and cavaliers against the Scotch troopers, who were dis-

pleasing alike to all parties. Colonel Briggs on reconnoitring the skirmish from the window, had the mortification of recognising several of his own men fighting in the true spirit of borderers, on the side of the Carlisle rioters against their hereditary enemies, but present allies, the Scots. The conflict, though fierce, was of brief duration.

The regular soldiers succeeded, as they generally do, in vanquishing their opponents, and clearing the streets of the rabble. Philipson had disappeared, having either effected his escape from the city, or taken shelter in the house of some loyal confederate within the walls.

Colonel Briggs, as soon as he saw the streets cleared, and tranquillity restored, ordered his horses to be attached to the coach, and drove to the castle, taking Althea with him, whom he feared to leave alone at Elisha's Raven, lest she should be carried off by Philipson, or exposed to personal

danger from the hostility of the landlord and his party. Althea passively resigned herself to his directions.

When they arrived at the castle, Colonel Briggs demanded an audience of the commanding officer, and they were admitted into the presence of Sir David Lesley, to whom he recounted the various annoyances to which he had been subjected, and requested that condign punishment might be inflicted on the ringleaders of the late riot.

Sir David Lesley, a smooth, fair-complexioned Scot, with light red hair, and a powerful military figure clad in belted buff and steel breastplate, listened with a bland smile to Colonel Brigg's complaints, taking an accurate survey of Althea at the same time, and then calmly replied :

“I were loth to say anything that might be unkindly taken by a fellow-soldier, in the same holy cause which hath drawn me and my brave countrymen over the border ; but

in truth, Colonel Briggs, you have provoked the late riot yourself, I understand, by endeavouring to have your marriage celebrated in a manner calculated to offend the covenanting brethren; and as for making examples of any of those who testified against so unlawful a proceeding, it cannot be thought of, even if you could point them out to a certainty, which I much doubt your power of doing. There are times, Colonel Briggs, when men are enforced to act according to duty rather than inclination, and mine at present prompts me, most reluctantly, to suggest to you the expediency of your leaving Carlisle as soon as you can, lest worse befall you."

Briggs was deeply offended at this speech, which he clearly understood in its true sense, as a positive, though politely-worded, order for departure from the town.

Stifling his choler, however, as best he might, he observed that it was really too late

to leave Carlisle that day in the present dangerous state of the roads, and that he must positively request shelter and hospitality in the castle for the night, on account of the indisposition of his ward, who was too ill and exhausted for want of rest and refreshment to proceed.

“I am sorry, Colonel Briggs, very sorry, to be compelled to do violence to my own feelings, especially where a lady, a fair lady, is concerned,” replied Sir David, with a bland smile; “but if you ever honour me with a visit at mine own house in Scotland, I trust to prove that want of hospitality is not among my faults, but here, alack! I am in a responsible situation, and cannot act as I could wish in respect to the accommodation you require.”

“You do not mean to say that you will oblige this invalid lady and myself to set forth on so perilous a journey this afternoon?” exclaimed Briggs, angrily.

“I am reluctantly compelled to recommend the expediency of your doing so without further loss of time,” returned Sir David, “I trust the fair lady will excuse me, and believe that it causes me no slight degree of pain to appear regardless of her convenience, but in sooth, madam, mine is a difficult position.”

“I assure you, sir,” replied Althea, “it is a matter of dead indifference to me whether I remain in Carlisle a few hours more or less.”

Briggs darted an angry glance at Althea, and observed in a sullen aside :

“When I, your guardian, madam, whom you are more especially bound to oblige, not to mention the word obey, require you to travel you are always pleading your ill-health as an excuse.”

“Oh fie ! colonel !” interposed Sir David, “you should not be so crabbit with your ward, who is—bating her cavalier fashion of array, and craving after prelatic ceremonies—a most discreet and obliging young gentlewoman, and

passing fair withal. By my yea and nay were I not a married man—but I am talking nonsense, I fear, for which I crave pardon of ye both—and so as this gentle lady hath been kind enough to say she doth not object to travel this afternoon, I shall be happy to offer you a cup of canary at parting, and to drink a safe and pleasant journey to ye both.”

“Hold, sir,” cried Briggs, “all this politeness may be sufficient in your opinion to atone for the summary manner in which you are pleased to turn us out with a bow and a compliment, but as a servant of the high court of parliament, I require more substantial civilities than the lip-deep courtesies you have accorded, and I make bold to demand the additional guard of as many troopers as you can appoint, for our personal safety on a road always dangerous, but more especially so at this crisis.”

“Oh, sir,” returned Sir David, “I am anxious to show all the civilities I can to the

officers of the English parliament, and I trust my zeal to accommodate myself to your wishes on this point will prove the reluctance with which I yield to the necessity my duty, as the military commander in this Canaanitish city of Carlisle, imposes.”

“How many troopers is it your intention to assign me for my escort?” asked Colonel Briggs, bluntly.

“How many?” returned the great man, hesitatingly. “How many, Colonel Briggs? Why you have eight well-armed and well-mounted veteran troopers of your own, besides four servants and yourself.”

“Myself!” exclaimed Briggs, angrily.

“Yes, yourself, sir. Surely I should be lacking in courtesy if I accounted the valiant and approved Colonel Bartholomew Briggs as nothing,” returned Sir David Lesley, with a ready bow and smile. “In truth,” continued he, “I do not opine it to be at all necessary to appoint you an additional escort, as in any

case of attack it will merely be necessary for you to mention your name to daunt assailants."

Briggs evinced his ingratitude for the compliment and disbelief of the sincerity of him by whom it was offered by the ejaculation of the contemptuous monosyllable "Pish."

Althea laughed, for she had become gradually interested in the scene, and not a little amused at the command of temper her irascible guardian had hitherto preserved, under circumstances of real provocation, and no less so at the superabundant politeness and flattery adopted by Sir David Lesley, while doing the rudest thing in the world. Flattery was, however, as much wasted on Colonel Briggs as tender caresses on a porcupine, he returned resolutely to the charge with the blunt question :

"Of what number of men is your promised escort to consist?"

"Promised?" echoed Sir David. "Colonel

Briggs, you surprise me. I am not aware of having made any promise of the kind. I appeal to this lady?"

"I am sure," replied Althea, smiling, "you said something exceedingly obliging, and the impression on my mind was that you were willing to grant the escort."

"Perfectly right, my dear madam. I was and am most willing to oblige Colonel Briggs and yourself, as far as my poor ability goes, unless it interferes with duty; and I trust you will both acquit me of disregard for your safety if I decline lessening the number of my men at this unsettled time."

"Death and destruction!" exclaimed Briggs, who could restrain his fury no longer; "do you mean to say, after all your fine speeches, that you will not assign me an escort?"

"I consider that you have a very efficient escort of your own," replied Sir David, coolly.

"So this is the end of your flattering pro-

fessions?" continued Briggs; and had he said no more he had been both wise and moderate in his reproaches; but his hereditary prejudices combining with his anger and vexation, prompted him to add a national taunt.

" 'Fair and false' is what they say of themselves, and whenever an English gentleman trusts to the promises of a smooth-tongued Scot, he will have cause to repent his folly."

This speech struck a chord that jarred rudely, for Sir David Lesley and his elder brother, the Earl of Leven, had broken faith to their confiding sovereign in entering England with banners displayed against him.

"It marvels me," retorted Sir David, "that a haughty southern borderer, like Colonel Briggs, should condescend to crave for his defence, in travelling through his own country, an escort of Scottish troopers, since he holds our national character in such disesteem."

Briggs bit his lip, twisted his cuff-band, and

glanced at Althea, as partly expecting her wit would help him out with a sharp rejoinder ; but Althea cared little whether they travelled with an escort or without, and considered the risk of falling into the hands of cavaliers, or even clubmen, preferable to remaining in the possession of her present unbeloved guardian.

High words, however, were bandied between the two gentlemen, for Sir David Lesley forgot all his extra politeness when his national feelings were offended, and Colonel Briggs indulged in such republican license of speech in the course of the altercation, that he had reason to consider himself fortunate in being permitted to depart from the castle unscathed, and still more so when he found himself and party without the walls of Carlisle, though dinnerless, and in the close of a wet day. Althea left Carlisle with a much lighter heart than she entered it, for at that hour on the preceding day she had not dared to flatter

herself with the hope of a respite from the misery of becoming the wife of Colonel Briggs. Scarcely could she persuade herself that the eventful scenes in which she had been involved, for the last eight and forty hours were indeed realities, so strange and dream-like was their retrospect. But though seated by Colonel Briggs's side in the old, familiar sad-coloured coach, she had been released by his own lips from the fatal promise that had been for so many months like a perpetual night-mare to her oppressed spirit. A thousand and a thousand times she whispered to herself, "I am free!" till yielding to fatigue, and lulled by the motion of the coach, she sank into a profound sleep, and though seated by the side of Colonel Briggs, her dreams were of love and Philipson.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE reports Colonel Briggs had received from the officers, by whom he had been visited in the morning were of a nature to decide him not to return through Penrith, especially after he had been refused an escort by Sir David Lesley. Bethuliel had also heard that a strong gathering of the cavalier gentlemen of that district, with their tenants and servants, was expected to take place in that town at one o'clock ; and even if it were over in the afternoon, large parties would probably infest the neighbourhood for two or three days. Under these circumstances, Colonel Briggs gave orders to his people to take the road to Cockermouth, which was occupied by

a parliamentary force, and where he trusted to obtain friendly reception and comfortable quarters for the night.

They reached the town safely, but were stopped at the outposts by the military sentinels on duty, and questioned.

Colonel Briggs's reply to the challenge, "Friends to the covenant and the righteous cause," obtained a free passage as far as the market-place. There the coach was again stopped and surrounded by troopers bearing torches, and exhibiting an eager desire to examine the features of the travellers.

"Who is your commander?" inquired Colonel Briggs of the subaltern on duty in an authoritative tone.

"The valiant and pious Colonel Bulward," replied he.

"Good! he is my familiar friend," said Briggs. "Tell him Colonel Briggs, of Calgarth Hall, hath just arrived with his company, and requests a billet to comfortable quarters

for the night, also accommodation for a young gentlewoman, his kinswoman and ward."

Colonel Bulward presently appeared, in person, at the side of the coach, shook hands cordially with Briggs, bade him heartily welcome to Cockermouth, and took an accurate survey of Althea. He perceived by the light of the torches that she was young and handsome, politely tendered his aid to assist her in alighting from the coach, and assured her "she should have the use of the state apartments in Cockermouth Old Hall, that had once been occupied by that evil woman Mary Queen of Scots for the night. She slept in that town on her way from Workington to Carlisle, when she took refuge in England in 1568."

"Would," replied Althea, "that I were worthy of the accommodations that have been honoured by that ill-fated queen, of whom the world was not worthy."

"Humph! she was the grandmother of

the tyrant Charles Stuart. I perceive, madam, by your dress, that you affect the malignant party, and, by your quick speech, that you are ready, young lady, to defend the iniquities of all that race," said the roundhead colonel, smiling.

"Yea," rejoined Briggs, who had planted himself on the other side of his fair captive, lest any attempt should be made to separate them, "she is the daughter of that noted malignant the late Sir Lionel Woodville, the husband of my godly aunt, and she affecteth to follow the opinions of her father."

"For lack of a little sound reasoning be-like," said Colonel Bulward. "Never fear, Briggs, I'll make it all plain to her to-night at supper."

"I am not accustomed to sup with gentlemen," replied Althea, coldly, "and being very weary, shall be only too glad to retire to the apartment you have courteously assigned to my use."

The entrance of Colonel Bulward and his regiment into Cockermouth had been so sudden and unexpected that the aged aunt of Sir Henry Fletcher and her maid still remained in the hall, having been unable to effect a retreat. They had received very civil treatment from the colonel, who made that house his head-quarters, and Mistress Mary Fletcher readily attended to his request that feminine attention should be shown to Mrs. Althea Woodville, and all the regard which circumstances permitted paid to her comforts.

Althea was in consequence ushered into Mrs. Mary Fletcher's dressing-room, while the bedroom appointed for her reception was made ready, and a fire lighted.

The venerable lady rose to welcome her, with a benevolent smile and a look of sympathy, kissed her, took her cold hand in hers, and drew her to a seat near the blazing hearth, and bade her waiting-woman prepare a cup of warm sack posset, with diet bread

and Naples biscuits for her refreshment, till something more substantial could be brought from below. Althea was beginning to apologize for her intrusion, but Mrs. Mary Fletcher interrupted her by observing :

“ No one wearing the dress of a friend to King Charles, can be unwelcome to a daughter of the loyal merchant of Cockermouth, Richard Fletcher, who had the honour of entertaining the fugitive queen of Scotland, in her distress, and thirty-six years afterwards was knighted by her royal son, in requital of the small service he had rendered to that ill-fated princess. Seventy-seven years,” added she, “ have passed away since Mary Stuart, queen of Scotland, dowager of France, and heir of line to England and Ireland, slept beneath this roof.”*

* See “ Life of Mary Queen of Scots,” by Agnes Strickland, vol. iii., for historical and local particulars connected with the circumstance.

“And you, madam, have seen her, then?” exclaimed Althea, eagerly.

“Yes; and she has seen me, held me in her own royal arms, and lavished tender caresses on me,” returned the old lady. “I am her name-child.”

“Strange,” said Althea, “that I should meet with a living link between her days and these.”

“Not stranger than, half a century hence, should your life be prolonged till then, your remembrance of the direful storm that at present scourges England will appear, maiden, to the young and gay, who may haply talk with you of King Charles and his times,” returned Mrs. Mary Fletcher.

“Half a century hence!” exclaimed Althea, “and I am so weary of the eleven dark months over the first score of years I have told! How should I bear the weight of fifty years in addition?”

“We are not sent into this world to enjoy

our own pleasure, and flit like butterflies over its summer flowers, but to do the will of God, to work for the weal of others, and to endure, if it be laid upon us, a burden of sorrow for ourselves, bearing meekly the destruction of youthful hopes and expectations," observed Mrs. Mary Fletcher, taking Althea's hand, and kindly pressing it.

The entrance of an attendant with a tray of refreshments, interrupted this conversation, and Althea was induced to partake of the food and restoratives of which she stood so greatly in need. Being much revived, she frankly confided her name to the kind and sympathizing hostess, on whose care she had been, thus unexpectedly thrown, telling her how she was situated with Colonel Briggs, and not omitting to lament the embarrassment she felt at having been deprived of the comfort of her maid's attendance, and the distress it was to her to travel without.

"And is it even so?" exclaimed Mrs.

Mary Fletcher, in an accent of surprise. "Then haply the young person whom my loyal friend, Major Philipson, asked me to take into my service till she could be replaced in that of her own lady, is the faithful servant whose loss you regret?"

"If her name is Milicent Hill, it will doubtless be the same," cried Althea, eagerly.

"Her name is Milicent Hill, and none else," replied Mrs. Mary Fletcher. "Go, Dorothy, and fetch her hither."

The next minute Milly Hill was enfolded in the arms of her kind lady, and laughing and sobbing alternately, for joy at their unexpected reunion, both mistress and maid protested that nothing should ever separate them from each other again.

That night Althea slept tranquilly and sweetly in the apartment Colonel Bulward had appointed for her reception, the tapestried state-chamber, with its carved alcove and crimson velvet bed, where Mary Stuart

reposed for the last night of her life in peace and comfort, beneath the hospitable roof of Richard Fletcher, the princely merchant of Cockermouth, all things in that noble suite of apartments remaining in the same state as when they had been honoured by the use of the royal stranger. Nothing had been disturbed by Colonel Bulward, who, when he took Cockermouth Old Hall for his own quarters, had testified his gentlemanly feelings and respect for the family of its lineal inheritor, Sir Henry Fletcher, from whom he had formerly received some courtesies, by ordering that neither plunder nor injury should be perpetrated within those walls, but that all things should be left in the same state in which he found them.

Cockermouth Hall is now abandoned to decay, and the noble suite of state apartments converted into lodging rooms for the humblest class of mechanics; yet the tradition that they were once occupied by Mary Queen of Scot-

land cleaves to those desolate chambers, notwithstanding the squalor and degradation into which they have fallen. Twenty years ago, when I explored them, a closet was pointed out to me as the place where Queen Mary was hidden the night she slept in Cockermouth Hall. That closet I discovered to be a portion of the arched alcove at the upper end of the state chamber, in which, of course, her bed was placed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AFTER a night of tranquil repose, Althea was roused betimes by a message from Colonel Briggs, requesting her to make herself ready to accompany him on their homeward journey at eight o'clock."

"Bid Colonel Briggs's servant tell his master, that I prefer remaining here, and am not minded to stir so early," replied Althea, haughtily. She considered it prudent, however, to rise, dress, and take refuge in Mrs. Mary Fletcher's apartments, which were contiguous to Queen Mary's chamber.

The old lady was already up, and reading a devotional volume, by the light of the

shaded silver lamp which stood on a small ebony table before her.

She rose and greeted Althea affectionately, with a kiss and tender embrace, and inquired how she had rested?

“Excellently well, dearest madam,” replied Althea.

“Yet you are pale, trembling, and agitated,” observed Mrs. Mary Fletcher; “hath aught amiss befallen to disquiet you, my child?”

“Yes; Colonel Briggs sent to awaken me this morning ere it was light, with an intimation that I must prepare to go hence with him at eight o’clock,” said Althea, with a quivering lip. “I would much rather remain where I am. May I not stay with you, dear madam?”

“As far as it depends on me, you shall be most welcome,” replied Mrs. Mary Fletcher, drawing Althea to her bosom; “but, alas! I am, as you see, a helpless

old woman, a prisoner in my nephew's house, withal, and, though treated with respect and courtesy by Colonel Bulward, I have no power to protect you, poor maiden! or to withhold you from the ruffian roundhead who claims the authority of a guardian."

A violent knocking at the door of the room where Althea had slept, was now heard. The two ladies paused, listened, and looked at one another in consternation.

"It is my gentle guardian beating a summons at my chamber-door," said Althea. "How glad I am I made my escape in time, locked the door when I left it, took away the key, and came to you."

"It is, I fear, but a momentary respite," observed Mrs. Mary Fletcher; "for he will be here anon; but in the interim, I would have you begin your breakfast."

Althea declared herself unable to eat while the suspense lasted.

After a time, Colonel Bulward came to inquire of Mrs. Mary Fletcher, where the young gentlewoman was ; for Colonel Briggs, having received no answer, had caused the door of the chamber where she slept, to be forced, and ascertaining that she was not there, was in a towering passion, and had not scrupled to accuse him of having spirited her away.

“ I positively wish you had,” said the old lady, with a smile ; “ for though unhappily engaged in the rebel cause, you are a gentleman, Colonel Bulward, and I believe the young lady would prefer your guardianship to that of Colonel Briggs.”

“ Oh, let me stay with you !” cried Althea, clinging to her.

“ If Colonel Bulward would be so courteous as to stand our friend in the matter that arrangement might possibly be accomplished,” said Mrs. Mary Fletcher.

Althea raised her clasped hands, and turned

her tearful eyes imploringly on Colonel Bulward's face.

“ Upon my word, ladies, I am in a sore strait between duty and my desire to oblige you,” said he, with a look of great perplexity. “ I really have no power to interfere between Colonel Briggs and his ward. He and I are both officers of equal rank in the service of the parliament; and he might and would call me to a sharp account were I to attempt to support and encourage this fair young gentlewoman, who is, he tells me, his near relation, and his ward, in her desire to withdraw herself from his protection and company on this journey.”

“ There is one thing you can do, Colonel Bulward,” said Mrs. Mary Fletcher, “ you are pre-eminent in authority in this house for the present, and can at least prevent Colonel Briggs from intruding into my apartments, where I have no desire to see him.”

“ Both Colonel Briggs and I are about

to leave Cockermouth, within the hour, madam," returned Bulward. "I am under marching orders, and must not delay under any pretext; but he not being in commission just now, may use his own pleasure in remaining behind, if this fair young gentleman is so perverse as to cause needless inconvenience by refusing to make herself ready to accompany him, which I can assure her will be of no avail to her, for he will not leave this house without her, he says."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE entrance of Briggs, who had at last succeeded in discovering Althea's place of refuge, was fully confirmatory of his brother officer's declaration touching his determination ; and Althea finding resistance would be useless, ceased to object to go, but, shifting her ground, gravely protested her inability to travel fasting. She then quietly seated herself at the table, and unlike a heroine of romance, persisted in making a comfortable breakfast.

Mrs. Mary Fletcher invited the two gentlemen to follow her example.

“ I have broken my fast two hours ago,” growled Briggs.

“ Good,” returned the old lady, smiling; “ you will be ready then for what our French neighbours style *déjeûner seconde*. Permit me to recommend this dish of fine fresh brandlings from the Derwent, to your attention, stewed with nasturtium sauce, or these eels, from the Cocker, or this leg of broiled woodcock. No! Really, you are very difficult, sir, for though mine is prison diet, it is, thanks to Colonel Bulward’s considerate courtesy, in forbidding his men to forage my private larder, indifferently good. See, here is cold venison pasty, too, in a standing crust, besides preserved cranberries and cream, and other sweet dishes.”

“ Marry, Briggs,” cried Colonel Bulward, who was somewhat of an epicure, if the sight and savour of all these dainties doth not whet your appetite, I can assure you it doth mine, so, even if I get into Tom Fairfax’s black books, by being a few minutes later at the muster, I must tarry to taste of this good

cheer, and would advise you to follow my example.”

Briggs congratulated himself on not being a slave to the allurements of creature comforts, and resolutely turned his back on the table, till Colonel Bulward and Althea rose, when he sullenly repeated his summons to the latter to pursue her journey to Calgarth Hall with him.

Althea having donned her travelling dress, and exchanged a tender farewell with Mrs. Mary Fletcher, who warmly invited her to come and take up her abode at Cockermouth Hall, if opportunity should allow and she found herself in need of a home and female protection.

Briggs impatiently cut these civilities short, by observing, “that time was too precious to be consumed in vain compliments,” and seizing the hand of the reluctant Althea, led her to the coach.

“Avaunt! what vessel of wrath is this?” exclaimed he, in indignant surprise, on per-

ceiving that a *petite* female figure was already occupying the opposite corner, with her back to the horses.

“No vessel of wrath, I trust, but a very beloved person,” said Althea, smiling. “One who is, at any rate, indispensable to my comfort, though I have been deprived of her services many a long month, through your tyranny, Colonel Briggs; but now I have happily met her once more, I am resolved not to be bereft of her attendance again; so, if you attempt to have her removed, I will not enter the coach.”

“Then I suppose the wench must bide,” rejoined Briggs; “but I give you both fair warning, that the first time I catch her at any of her old tricks, I’ll fling her into the lake with mine own hands!”

“Nay, nay, colonel, I’ll cling so fast about your neck, that if I drown, you will drown with me,” responded Milly, from her corner, with a merry laugh.

“ Well resolved, bonny lass,” cried Colonel Bulward; “ he would be a harder-hearted man than I take him for, if he could harm thee.”

“ She hath acquired a greater amount of confidence, at Cockermouth, than I even gave her credit for possessing,” exclaimed Colonel Briggs; “ but only let her take heed to her ways, that is all.”

“ I will engage for her discretion,” said Althea, as she took her place in the coach.

Briggs mounted his charger and rode with Colonel Bulward, leaving Althea and her attendant to travel *tête-à-tête*, in the heavy cumbrous vehicle.

Althea had so many questions to ask, so much to hear connected with Philipson, that the time glided only too swiftly away. She now learned that Philipson, on his return to the Long Holme Island, after his life had been ransomed by her promise to become the wife of Colonel Briggs, had

sent Milly to rejoin her at Calgarth Hall. But that she had been rudely repelled by the order of Briggs, refused admittance within the mansion, and told “to return whence she came, for he would not allow spies and go-betweens of the malignant, Robert Philipson, to be about Mistress Woodville.” On which, Philipson had provided an asylum for her in her distress, by recommending her to the care and protection of his ancient friend, Mrs. Mary Fletcher, of Cockermouth Hall, where, after a separation of upwards of eight months, she and her lady were happily reunited in an unexpected hour.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

COLONEL BULWARD and his men were chiefly strangers to the intricacies of that district, and the task of guiding the party to Keswick devolved on Briggs. He led them through the vale of Lorton, following the course of the Cocker, which was much swollen by the late rains and rapid thaw.

The nearest as well as the safest route, would have been the low road beside Bassenthwaite, but it was flooded, and in many places, utterly impassable. As a matter of necessity, therefore, he abandoned the open track, and led the men through the wild

mountain pass of Whinlatter Fells. It was of course, slow work, climbing the steep hills that commanded a backward prospect of the Scottish coast, and the blue mountains across the Solway.

Broken drifts of snow still hung on the rugged shelves of Wythop and the rifted peaks of Skiddaw, notwithstanding the late heavy rains which had augmented all the tributaries of Bassenthwaite, from glistening silvery threads into the white foaming torrents that now came leaping down the mountain sides in angry force.

Purple storm clouds now swathed the opposite peaks of Skiddaw, as they advanced, and gave gloomy magnificence to the scene.

“This may be very grand and sublime for those who admire the rough side of nature,” observed Colonel Bulward; “but a wilder country I never traversed, and to tell you a bit of my mind, Briggs, I wish

we were well through the pass, which would afford only too advantageous an opportunity for an enterprising foe to attack us, if aware of our approach."

Briggs replied, "that with their present force there could be no reasonable cause for apprehension ; but it would not be very amiss to hasten their march,"

Colonel Bulward gave the word for the trumpet to sound the call for accelerating speed. The enlivening tan-tara-tan-tara notes awoke the threefold echoes of Wythop, Grassmoor, and Barf, and were repeated across the lake from the more distant heights of Skiddaw. A rattling peal of thunder followed.

"Look ! look !" exclaimed Althea, with a gesture of mingled surprise and terror, directing the attention of Millicent Hill to the appearance of a female figure stationed on a projecting crag of Whinlatter Fell. "It is Merab !" she fearfully added, as a broad sheet

of lightning, from the dark cloud above her, gleamed on the picturesque costume and unmistakable form of the sybil, standing as it were between earth and heaven in lonely grandeur, more like the fabled spirit of the mountain pass, rising to dispute the march of the advancing host, than a creature of flesh and blood.

Althea felt a strange thrill run through her veins as she gazed on this mysterious being, whose appearance had always boded some extraordinary change in her own destiny, and wondered for what purpose the daring sybil had planted herself in a pass thus perilous, at the certainty, if observed by the troops when defiling below the eyrie where she was perched, of becoming the mark at which a hundred carbines would be pointed. She tremblingly expected in the meantime to see her swept from her station by the electric breeze that suddenly agitated her garments.

And now a general exclamation from officers and men announced the fact that they, for the first time, descried her. The universal start and retrograde motion that instantaneously took place betrayed the superstitious terror that pervaded the foremost ranks.

“What is the reason of your halt, my lads?” demanded Colonel Bulward, riding to the front of the line.

“There ! there, your honour,” cried they in a breath, pointing to the motionless figure of Merab.

“Fire at it !” shouted he, a fearful perception of the real peril in which they were involved flashing on his mind, as Merab signalled with the light hazel wand she held over an angular edge of the fell to a sloping hollow below in the bosom of the mountain.

The men stood, as it were, paralyzed, each with uplifted finger indicating the object of their alarm.

A second flash of lightning darted from the rifted cloud, followed by a terrific roll of thunder. Phenomena so unusual, at that season of the year, were attributed by the soldiers to supernatural agency, and served to increase their panic.

“It is the witch of Windermere,” exclaimed Colonel Briggs, who had recognised Merab. “She is enleagued with Robin the Devil, and is acting as his scout.” Then lowering his voice, he whispered, “Bulward, we are all dead men.”

“Fire at her!” shouted Colonel Bulward to his men; “fire, ye poltroons; and five broad pieces to the man whose bullet brings her down.”

Twenty carbines were instantly raised and pointed at Merab.

Althea screamed aloud and hid her face on Milly’s shoulder, as the volley rang and was reverberated among the hills.

“Look up, dear lady, she is unharmed,”

cried Milly. "See! see! she stands unscathed, proud and erect as ever."

A second volley was fired with more deliberate aim at the undaunted sybil, but was ineffectual as the first. She stood, amidst the shower of bullets that rattled round her, calm and motionless as the craggy pedestal which supported her statue-like form. She stood not there without a purpose. A second signal from her wand was answered by a wild shout from the fierce clubmen of the district, who now rose up, simultaneously, from their ambush, and flung down from the rugged heights huge stones and fragments of rock on the troops below. Colonel Bulward was the first victim of a hecatomb that, in less than ten minutes' time, was prostrated by the formidable missiles hurled from the fells above by the energetic defenders of the soil, true representatives of the bold Sistuntian Britons.

The influence which Merab's determined character and occult reputation, her courage,

talents, and beauty, had acquired among these wild mountaineers and peasants, had enabled her to render effectual service to Philipson, in the guerilla-like warfare he carried on in support of the royal cause in the lake district. She had, by means of her spies in Carlisle, ascertained that Briggs would sleep at Cockermouth, and form a junction with Colonel Bulward to march on the following day to Keswick, and proceed the next morning to Calgarth Hall with Althea.

She had given Philipson, who lingered in the neighbourhood, prompt information of these arrangements, and concerted plans with the leaders of the clubmen for the ambush in the mountain hollow, taking into account the deviation from the ordinary route which would be caused by the melting of the snow and the swell of Bassenthwaite.

The delay occasioned by Althea's determination to stay at Cockermouth Hall had given more time for carrying the project into effect ;

and the unlooked-for occurrence of the thunder-storm at the moment of carrying it into execution, had contributed in no slight degree to the success of the enterprise, by the terror with which it inspired the soldiers, who imputed it to the magical powers of the witch of Windermere.

Colonel Briggs having taken upon himself the command of the shattered remains of the regiment after the fall of Colonel Bulward, succeeded with great difficulty in rallying and leading them towards Brathwaite ; but it was only to encounter fresh assailants ; for at the entrance of the Vale of Codal, Philipson and a party of his trusty followers attacked them in front. The rout was now complete ; for many of the roundhead soldiers, dispirited by the fall of Colonel Bulward, and having little confidence in their self-constituted leader, threw down their arms, and called out lustily for quarter. This the clubmen, who had now descended from the fells and formed a junction

with the cavaliers in the valley, were by no means disposed to grant, having been exasperated by the foraging depredations of the parliamentary regiment in that district, previously to the occupation of Cockermouth by Colonel Bulward. Armed with scythes, sickles, hatchets, flails, hoes, and clubs only, and subject to no restraints of military discipline, the stout agrarian muster could, with difficulty, be withheld from perpetrating a vengeful massacre on their discomfited foes. But Merab, who had left the mountain-side, and was at their head, exhorted them with persuasive eloquence to pay due regard to the orders of Major Philipson, and not stain their victory with unnecessary bloodshed.

Philipson, riding to the front of his party, waved a white handkerchief, as a signal that he desired a parley with the commander of the roundhead forces.

The angry din of battle was instantaneously

suspended, and the deep silence that ensued was only broken by the heavy plashing of the rain, and the low muttering of the retiring thunder in the distance.

CHAPTER XXIX.

“COLONEL BRIGGS,” said Philipson, “you and your people are soundly beaten, and my good friends, the clubmen here, are very desirous of doing themselves the pleasure of cutting your throats; but as I do not approve of cold-blooded slaughter, I will allow you all to retreat through Thornthwaite to Penrith unscathed, provided you throw down your arms, and surrender yonder lady, together with the coach and horses, to me.”

“I’ll see you both in the pit of Tophet, first,” replied Briggs, sullenly.

But the troopers eagerly exclaimed :

“Agreed! we accept the terms!” and

beckoned the coachman, who had drawn the carriage and terrified horses into a sheltered nook, behind the line, out of the late hurly-burly and confusion, to drive up.

Philipson dismounted, and flew with a lover's haste to assure himself that Althea was safe and uninjured by the shower of dangerous missiles through which the coach had passed. Some damage had been sustained by the panels of the coach, but she had escaped unhurt.

The deadly pallor which blanched her cheek and lip, and her wild glance of terror as he advanced, proceeded from a cause that touched her heart more nearly than all the horrors of the stormy conflict she had just witnessed.

Bethuliel, with an unsheathed bayonet in his hand, was approaching Philipson from behind with a stealthy step, and an unmistakable expression of murderous malice in his eye.

With a piercing cry, Althea sprang from her seat, and made a desperate effort to burst open the door of the coach; her attempt was ineffectual, and she sank back in a deep swoon. But while she was powerless alike to save or warn him, his danger had been observed by an eye, no less solicitous for Philipson's safety than her own, and the shield of a devoted woman's breast was promptly interposed between the murderous weapon and his heart.

“Merab!” exclaimed Philipson, turning hastily about, as she sank against his shoulder, with a suppressed groan. He prevented her from sinking to the earth by supporting her in his arms, and whispered, in soothing accents:

“Merab, I hope you are not wounded?”

She raised her dark, expressive eyes to his face with a dying effort, and murmuring:

“Happy, happy, happy! that I was not

too late !” breathed her last sigh on his bosom.

Bethuliel was preparing to repeat his thrust, when he was dashed to the earth by the broadsword of Wat Sorby, never to rise again.

The next moment, Colonel Briggs, who was in the act of aiming a pistol at Philipson, was seized and overpowered by the same strong arm, and would have paid the forfeit of his life if Philipson had not shouted :

“ Sorby, forbear ! The fighting is over, and I will not have any one killed in cold blood.”

Sorby yielded reluctant obedience to the mandate, muttering, as he sheathed his weapon :

“ Now, that is what I call nonsense, unless the major means to give the traitor up to the justice of the halter he deserves. However,” observed he, as he bound Colonel Briggs’s arms, “ I’ll take care you don’t have the

opportunity of popping off pistols at my master after receiving quarter."

Philipson, with manly tenderness, supported the lifeless form of Merab in his arms long after the vital spark had fled. He then, with a whispered prayer for the repose of her soul, covered her remains with his military cloak, and resigned them to the care of a party of the High Furness mountaineers, who gathered around the corpse with wild cries of lamentation. They constructed a bier from the boughs of the mountain ash, and having placed the body of their beloved female leader upon it, six of their number reverentially raised it on their shoulders, and, followed by their comrades, bore it away towards the solitary mountain glens, whence she had led them to victory.

CHAPTER XXX.

ALTHEA had been kindly removed from the coach, while yet insensible, by the considerate care of Mr. Withers, the pastor of the village where the concluding scene of the conflict had taken place, and, with the assistance of Milly and one of his people, carried into his parsonage, a peaceful cottage adjoining the green churchyard of Braithwaite.

All things bore to her the semblance of a dream when she revived; the tumult of the fierce skirmish was over, the storm had subsided, and the sun was shining cheerfully through the broad casement. A bright peat fire was burning on the hearth, which restored

genial warmth to her benumbed frame, and a young woman of sweet, sympathizing aspect was assisting Milly in administering restoratives to her, and chafing her hands and temples. Both united in an ejaculation of thankfulness when Althea unclosed her eyes, and presently, raising herself from the humble settee on which they had placed her in a recumbent attitude, looked about her with an anxious and inquiring glance.

Milly understood the silent language of that look, and, bending over her, whispered :

“ He is safe.”

Althea's bosom heaved convulsively, her lip quivered, and tears stole silently from under her long dark lashes. The door was opened by a hurried hand, Philipson entered, rushed to her, snatched her to his heart, and kissed the bright drops from her cheek.

Mary Withers quietly stole away with Milly into an inner room, but the gratulations of the lovers were soon interrupted by

the entrance of Wat Sorby and his prisoner, Colonel Briggs.

Mary Withers then returned, spread a clean white cloth on the table, and invited them all to partake of the humble meal of eggs and bacon, oatmeal porridge and cream, she had prepared.

“A thousand thanks, kind maiden,” cried Philipson.

“Come, Wat Sorby, unpinion Colonel Briggs, that he may use his knife and fork in comfort; for if he is half as hungry as I am, he will be ready to do justice to this good fare.”

Briggs responded with an unintelligible growl to Philipson's courtesy, rubbed and stretched his arms, which had been bound inconveniently tight, and took his place at table with the rest. When the welcome repast was ended, and thanks returned by their reverend host, Mary Withers served them each with a cup of mead, Philipson rose, drank

“the king’s health, and success to the cause ;” then laying his hand on the shoulder of Mr. Withers, asked, in a significant tone, if he would oblige him with a cast of his office.

“Why do you look at me with such inquiring eyes, Althea ?” continued he, turning fondly to her. “Do you suppose I mean to be parted from you again till you are my wedded wife ?”

“Althea Woodville,” interposed Briggs, “have you not solemnly promised to become mine ?”

“You have solemnly pronounced my release from that abhorrent promise,” she replied.

“Something to that effect was, I believe, extorted from me at Carlisle illegally, under fear of death,” said Briggs.

“And was not the promise most cruelly extorted from me under threats of death for one whose life was infinitely more precious to me than mine own ?” exclaimed Althea,

passionately, "and therefore do I consider myself in conscience free from its bondage."

"Your conscience settles matters conveniently, madam," returned Briggs; "but have you forgotten your promise to your dying mother not to marry without my consent, and to remain under my roof and guardianship until the completion of your one-and-twentieth year?"

"I scarcely lack one short month of that period," said Althea, looking in his face with pleading eyes.

"I'll not bate one moment of it," he sternly replied.

"If Major Philipson had not stopped my hand in an unlucky moment, you would have been in no condition to forbid his banns," observed Sorby; "but it is an easy matter, at any time, to stop the croaking of a caged raven."

"Ha!" cried Philipson, observing Briggs

turn deadly pale at the implied threat; “you are now wholly at my mercy, cousin Bat, and could scarcely wonder if I were to make reprisals on you by treating you as you did me, when you ordered a gibbet to be built up, and a coffin knocked together, for my use, in my own presence; but I scorn you too much to make your conduct a rule for mine. It is in your power to delay my happiness by refusing your consent to your ward’s marriage for a month, and in mine to conduct you to the royal camp, and surrender you to be dealt with according to martial law. I do not consider your consent an indispensable preliminary to my marriage with our fair cousin; but, as she does, I am willing to purchase it at the price of your release.”

“You shall have it then, on that condition,” said Briggs. “Take her to wife, if you will, and much good may she do you. Althea Woodville, I herewith signify my

consent to your marriage with this godless and deboshed malignant, in the full persuasion that he will hang or drown himself before he has been your husband a month."

"I'll take the risk," said Philipson, laughing, and I hope his reverence here will not keep us waiting, as I am in haste to call her mine."

"Should I solemnize the service of holy matrimony between you and the lady, within the walls of a roofless church, and at a broken, desecrated altar?" asked Mr. Withers mournfully.

"As I am not a member of your Church, the things of which you speak will not particularly affect me," replied Philipson, gaily, "so as my bride can make herself content. Say, Althea."

Althea blushed, and looking down on her mourning dress, said in a low voice :

"I confess to being superstitious, and should scarcely like to be married in this

doleful array, which doth so ill beseem a bride."

Philipson looked troubled, but Mary Withers timidly approached, whispered to Althea, and both withdrew, followed by Milly.

Philipson employed the interval in writing a passport for Colonel Briggs.

"I shall want my coach and horses, to convey me back to Calgarth Hall," said Briggs, sullenly, taking the paper.

"Cousin Bat," replied Philipson, merrily, "they are the spoils of battle. I require them for the accommodation of myself and bride on our homeward journey. To-morrow night, however, they shall be faithfully restored to you. Your servants are free to attend you."

"What use will they be without my horses?" demanded Briggs, angrily.

"That," said Philipson, "I leave you to determine."

"Verily, thou art the most lawless and

unbeloved person in all Westmoreland," exclaimed Briggs.

"Not quite, when you are in the county," retorted Philipson, laughing.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHEN Althea re-entered, Philipson declared he had never seen her look so lovely. She had exchanged her sombre mourning weeds for a simple jacket and petticoat of spotless white dimity, with a white silk hood and cloak, the dress which Mary Withers, who was about to wed the squire of the parish, had prepared for her own bridal, but generously devoted its first use to her fair guest, together with the white ribbons, gloves, and thread-stockings, which completed the *toilette*. She had also, in compliance with Althea's earnest entreaty, made herself ready to accompany her to the church in the capacity of bridemaids.

The venerable village pastor, arrayed in his surplice and bands, bareheaded, and with his book in his hand, preceded the lovers and their faithful attendants, Wat Sorby, Mary Withers, and Millicent Hill, down the aisle of his ruined church.

Philipson honoured his trusty follower, stout Wat Sorby, with the office of giving away the bride, jocosely promising to requite that good service by bestowing li'le Betty upon him with his own hand, and a wedding-present of fifty broad pieces. Then, drawing a small ruby ring from his little finger, with the device of two united hearts, he delivered it to Mr. Withers when they reached the chancel, placing at the same time a handful of gold and silver on the book, in compliance with the custom of his own Church. And there, while the familiar redbreast, perched on the broken arch above them, sang response, Philipson and Althea plighted their nuptial vows.

They returned to the little vicarage to sign the register, and receive a certificate of the marriage.

“You have this day,” said Philipson, to Mr. Withers, “assisted to render me the happiest of men, but I must not forget that we have a melancholy duty to perform before I leave this place, that of witnessing the interment of the brave men who fell in the recent conflict, for I would not have the remains of either friend or foe left above ground, exposed to the ravages of the raven and the fox.”

A wide trench had been already dug in the churchyard by the gallant survivors, assisted by the peasants, and the bodies of the slain were placed in decent order for their brief obsequies.

Mr. Withers accompanied Philipson to the spot to read the burial-service, and see them decently covered with earth.

One service sufficed for them all. Cava-

liers and roundheads had been hurriedly consigned to one common grave, and notwithstanding the deadly feud that had divided them in life, they were in death collectively united, and comprehended in the tender epithet of "our departed brothers," in the burial service of the Church of England, which the venerable village pastor impressively read over them.

When the solemn rite was concluded, and the earth heaped upon the grave, Philipson hastened back to the vicarage, where he had left his bride under the care of Mary Withers, Milly, and Wat Sorby.

"Come, my beloved," said he, "we shall need another cup of mead, and a service of sugar-rolls, or any other refreshment Mistress Mary Withers can supply, before we start, for we have a long journey to perform."

"Whither are we going?" asked Althea.

"Where, but to Calgarth Hall?" replied Philipson.

“To Calgarth Hall?” exclaimed Althea, in surprise.

“Yes, my sweet wife, it is there I intend to spend my bridal,” replied Philipson.

“Not surely, as the guest of Colonel Briggs?”

“No, I am the lawful owner of that mansion, and I trust to win it by a *coup de main*, before his return,” said Philipson.

“Are you not wild to dream of such knight-errantry?” asked Althea, anxiously,

“Not a bit of it, my fair bride,” rejoined Philipson; “I have horses and men-at-arms. Briggs has neither; but will have to sleep at Keswick to-night, for lack of means to continue his journey, while we shall dash merrily over hill and dale, heath and moor, with his four stout blacks, by the light of the moon, which will be at full to-night. Tut! ’tis the easiest exploit in the world.”

“My Philipson, you forget there is a garrison at Calgarth.”

“ Yes ; four solemn psalm-singers, who were left under the orders of Elkanah Nobbs. They will soon come to a quaver, I trow, when I sound a summons to surrender,” cried Philipson. “ What, ho ! Wat Sorby, will Briggs’s horses take us to Calgarth to-night ? ”

“ They must ; they shall ; they will ! with cavalier post-lads to urge them,” replied Sorby.

A light meal was hastily taken, and a stirrup-cup of mead quaffed by the cavalier troopers to the health of the bridegroom and the bride, and success to the enterprise.

Althea and Milly were handed into the coach by Philipson. He and Wat Sorby then leapt on horseback and rode on either side, at the head of a gallant escort of sixteen well armed men ; and so they passed under the lofty heights of Helvellyn and Helme Crag, pausing to breathe and bait the horses at Wythburne and at Grassmere, and then passing the fair lake of Rydal, they reached Ambleside.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE moon was still shining gloriously in a cloudless sky, and silvering the Troutbeck hills, when the travellers approached Calgarth Park.

Deceived by the appearance of the familiar coach and horses, the porter supposed Colonel Briggs had returned, as was expected, with his bride, and opened the gates. The same mistake occurred at the fortalice. The draw-bridge was lowered without waiting for a summons; the portcullis was promptly raised, and the party crossed the court unchallenged. But when Althea, who had left Calgarth only three days before to be married to Colonel

Briggs, alighted from the coach in her bridal dress, accompanied by her cavalier bridegroom, and attended by Wat Sorby and Milly Hill, the astonishment of the servants and the consternation of Elkanah Nobbs was expressed in so ridiculous a manner, that she laughed more heartily than she had supposed it would ever have been possible to do within those walls.

The mirth of Philipson equalled her own, nor could Wat Sorby refrain from joining in the infectious glee.

When Philipson had recovered his composure, he called the household and garrison together, and explained the circumstances which had contributed to substantiate his claims to Calgarth Hall, by rendering him its actual possessor, in consequence of defeating Colonel Briggs and capturing his coach and horses, so that he and his trusty followers had been admitted into the fortalice by mistake.

“Now, I am here,” continued Philipson, “I

mean to tarry, and hold mine own against all challengers. Those among you who wish to depart are free to do so, and may take their personal property with them ; but if any of you are willing to remain, and serve me and the noble lady, my wife, I will promise you good entertainment and higher wages for the time to come ; but remember, it is on condition of crying, God save King Charles, and fighting for him when required."

All professed their wish to remain, and made the hall ring with loyal cheers for the king, and good wishes for Major Philipson and his bonny bride.

Elkanah Nobbs looked wistfully at Althea, twitched his hands, cleared his throat, and thus bespeak her : " Fair Mistress Philipson, as I should be loth to leave my flock without a shepherd, the spirit moves me to supplicate thee to make instance to thy spouse that I may continue to bide here in the capacity of his chaplain."

“How, Master Nobbs, chaplain to the king of Ai?” asked Philipson, merrily.

“Honoured sir, I do perceive you remember my poor sermon,” rejoined Elkanah, meekly; “but verily, the colonel, my master, chose that text, and I was enforced to accept the same and improve upon it for the occasion, and I humbly trust you were comforted and edified by the same.”

“Not a very comfortable thing to hear that it would be a godly and praiseworthy thing to hang me,” said Philipson.

“Under favour, noble sir,” pleaded Elkanah, “I was bound, and so we are all, to declare that it was a righteous deed to hang that benighted heathen king of whom I spake in the text Colonel Briggs appointed me. Howbeit, being aware that your minutes were numbered, I did my utmost to lengthen my discourse, whereby the span of your mortal life was prolonged till such time as fair Mistress Woodville came

and ransomed you by promising to wed the colonel ; so I humbly opine that my sermon was the instrument of preserving you from the death to which you were doomed."

"He is right," said Althea, aside, to Philipson ; "if his sermon had been shorter I should have been too late. It was the extra length of that exhortation saved you."

"Well, then, in consideration of that good service, Master Nobbs, you shall be welcome to remain here, at free quarters, as long as may be agreeable to you," said Philipson ; "but my chaplains, as you are aware, are to be of a different cloth, and, therefore, you will have to refrain yourself from preaching, unless to those of your own way of thinking. Now, Joseph Foxcraft, bring hither a stoup of wine that all the household may drink health and happiness to my bride and me."

The next day when Colonel Briggs, who had been joined on the road by the stragglers of his party, presented himself at the gates of

Calgarth, he found them barred against him, and the banner of the Five Feathers—the ancient family cognizance of Philipson—floating over them.

His summons was answered with a defiance; and he never succeeded in again obtaining admittance within those walls.

And what became of Kerenhappuch?

Dear reader, we will oblige you with the desired information. The report of her savings, and the legacy of her late mistress being quadrupled by errant fame, attracted a suitor, who would have been cold to the charms of an indigent Venus, a man who esteemed a practical knowledge of cookery of tenfold more value in a woman than the evanescent qualities of youth and beauty. This man, gentle reader, was Lieutenant Coniah Croker, who encountered her soon after her expulsion from Calgarth Hall, and escorted her to Lancaster, made her a matrimonial proposal by the way, and was accepted.

They were married at Lancaster, according to the established form of solemnizing matrimony by the predominant sect of which both were members, by having their banns proclaimed at the town-cross on three successive market-days.

They quarrelled the first week, and Kerenhappuch publicly congratulated herself, "that she had never promised to love, honour, or obey that despised and broken idol, Coniah Croker." Coniah Croker, not to be behind-hand, retorted, "that he had cause to rejoice that he had escaped the awful perjury of pledging himself to love and cherish such a bitter gourd as the evil-tempered woman with whom he was yoked." And having possessed himself of all her wordly goods, granted her the indulgence of a separate establishment without alimony.

The next stirring occurrence at Calgarth Hall was the arrival of li'le Betty riding

behind her father, Old Jonas Brayd, of the Feathers, on a pillion covered with crimson, and trimmed with gold lace, and a riding-skirt and jacket of Kendal green—brave testimonials of Philipson's gratitude for the preservation of Althea's life through her considerate loan of the said pillion on the memorable night of crossing the sands, which had been returned thus beautified, accompanied with the gift of the new riding-dress. She and her father were affectionately received by Wat Sorby, and warmly welcomed to Calgarth by Philipson and Althea. They were invited and expected guests.

The next morning li'le Betty, arrayed in the trim bridal dress that had been prepared for her under Althea's superintendence, was led by Major Philipson to a gaily-caparisoned boat rigged with white flags, followed by Wat Sorby in his wedding-dress of Kendal green, with white satin rosettes on his shoulders, and a

white feather in his hat. Old Jonas, in crimson-slashed doublet, and black satin padded hose, toddled by his side. The four rowers wore scarlet doublets and white favours.

The bridal party was preceded by another boat, with pipes, tabors, and rebecks, making jovial melody, to the chapel in the Lady Holme, where Father Rolliston was in readiness to unite the hands of Walter Sorby and Elizabeth Brayd, in holy matrimony, according to the interdicted rites of their own church.

Philipson gave the bride away, and on their return to Calgarth Hall led her out to open the ball with him. Althea honoured the bridegroom with her hand, and all the household joined in the merry dance except Elkanah Nobbs.

Unexpected guests arrived in the midst of the merrymaking. These were no other than the two Welsh cavaliers, Philipson's military

elèves at Chester, Lord Dolgelly and his friend and companion-in-arms, Sir Owen Penrynn, attended by the former captain of the Cheshire Clubmen, Maurice Mortlock, who, disgusted with the life of an agrarian brigand, had entered the king's service as a volunteer. He had honourably distinguished himself as a cavalier, and now held the rank of lieutenant in Lord Dolgelly's company, who had formed a close friendship with him, and invited him to accompany them on their expedition to Calgarth.

The two noble Welsh cavaliers had entered into an amicable agreement to proceed thither in quest of Althea; and if they succeeded in meeting with her, to declare their undying love for her, and implore her to take her choice between them by accepting the one she could best affect for a husband. They were greatly disappointed on finding themselves too late, and that their commanding officer, Major

Philipson, had won the fair prize. They consoled themselves, however, as well as they could by remaining as the guests of the happy pair during their leave of absence.

Lieutenant Maurice Mortlock, more fortunate in the object of his journey, was a successful wooer to Millicent Hill, who promised to become his wife at the blessed return of peace, provided he would allow her to remain with her lady till then.

I will now drop the curtain while the sunshine is yet on the picture, for evil days were at hand, though Althea was spared the pangs of weeping over the ruin of the royal cause and the tragic fate of the king. She died in the flower of her days, in the midst of happiness too great to last. Philipson was long inconsolable, he sought forgetfulness of his bitter anguish by engaging in siege and battle, where he was always foremost. As he was a real character, genealogical records

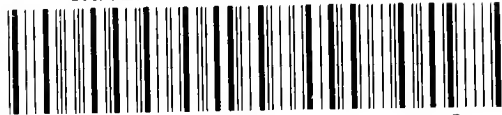
forbid me to ignore the fact that he finally contracted a less romantic marriage, for, like other disconsolate widowers, he became the husband of another lady.

THE END.

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